

**NINE**  
**TEMPLES OF BANGKOK**

By

**HELEN BRUCE**

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*His Majesty Somdej Phra Poramanedara Maha Pumipol Aduldej  
as a bhikkhu in 1956 A.D.*



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*H.B.*

## INTRODUCTION

"Nine Temples of Bangkok" by Mrs. Helen Bruce is worthy of consideration as one of the best books on Thai cultural matters written by a foreigner. In the chapter on Buddhism in Thailand describing the life of Lord Buddha, Buddhism, the lives of monks, novices and lay disciples, Bot, Vihara, Buddhist Lent, the influence of Buddhism on Thai social life, and the different styles of Buddha images, although the various sections are briefly written, they are very accurate.

The Thai should be proud that this book will give foreigners accurate information on nine important temples of Bangkok and Thonburi.

No book has previously explained the mural paintings in the Bot of Wat Bovonives. The writer also gives accurate information about the reclining Buddha in the Vihara Phra Sasda and various Buddha images in the precincts of this Wat. What visitors ought to see and appreciate at Wat Phra Jetubon has been revealed in detail. I particularly wish to draw attention to Phra Jinaraj and Phra Jinasih whose stories engraved on stone at Phra Lokkanart Vihara have seldom been mentioned by writers.

Exact details have been given about the Buddha images in the niches outside the gallery at Wat Benchamabopit. These are very old images of the Amaravati and Dvaravati periods.

I who have had the honour to inspect this book, have learned many things from it.

*Luang Boribal Buribhand.*

National Museum, Bangkok,  
13th March, 1900.

## BUDDHISM IN THAILAND

**T**HAILAND IS A BUDDHIST COUNTRY. Buddhism started in India where it was a reaction to the existing Hinduism and the Brahmin priests.

The Buddha was born in May in the year 623 B.C. at Kapilavatthu in Nepal. He was a prince of the Gotama family and heir to his father's throne. He was known as Prince Siddhartha.

There are many stories connected with his birth, life and death. He is said to have appeared to his mother before his birth is a six-tusked white elephant. After his birth, as soon as he touched the earth, a lotus sprang up and an umbrella was seen in the sky. It was prophesied at his birth that he would renounce his throne in favour of the life of an ascetic, and his father tried to interest him in worldly pleasures in order to defeat the prophesy.

In due course, at the age of sixteen, he was married and had a son. On three occasions, whilst outside the palace, the sight of a very old man, a diseased person and a corpse caused him to ponder on the inevitability of human suffering and on the transient nature of human happiness. On his fourth visit to the outside world he saw a bhikkhu or monk with his alms bowl, wearing the yellow robe. This decided him to leave the palace, his wife and child in search of truth, and he set out on his horse.



Having failed to find what he sought from the teachers, he exposed himself to torture and fasting for a number of years. When he decided to give this up as it was not leading him to his goal, he sat down under a Bodhi (pronounced Bo) tree at Buddhagaya and, during his meditation, he found enlightenment and became Buddha. This was in the month of May and he was then thirty-five.

During his fasting years he had been accompanied by five ascetics who left him when he decided to give up the fast. After his enlightenment, they rejoined him. Disciples followed him, many of them from noble families. He spent the rest of his life preaching sermons which were later written down as the Dharma, the law or doctrine of the Buddhist faith.

\* \* \*

There are two main schools of Buddhism, the Hinayana or Lesser Vehicle (which has also been called the Vehicle which has been Abandoned) and the Mahayana or Greater Vehicle. The Hinayana is sometimes called Southern Buddhism as it is observed in Ceylon, Burma, Thailand, Laos and Cambodia; Mahayana, the Northern School, is practised in Tibet, Nepal, Annam (North Vietnam), China, Mongolia, Korea and Japan.

The disciples of Mahayana tend to regard Hinayana as in fact the Little Vehicle and of secondary importance. It can,

however, be argued that the beliefs and practices of Hinayana are closer to the original teachings of the Buddha. In Thailand the term Hinayana is not used, being regarded as rather derogatory. The School calls itself Theravada, or the kind of Buddhism practised by the 'theras' or teachers.

In the northern countries a bhikkhu is ordained for life and bhikkhu comprise a very small proportion of the male population, but in the southern countries every man is expected to spend at least three months of his life in a wat or monastery. A traveller coming from Japan to Thailand would find certain differences in the habits of bhikkhu occasioned by the different approach to Buddhism. Thai bhikkhu are not vegetarians and may smoke. Bhikkhu in the Mahayana Order may eat after mid-day, whereas in Thailand they may only drink between noon and sunrise. The one hundred and eight bead rosary is carried by the Mahayana bhikkhu.

\* \* \*

It is necessary to understand something of the history of Thailand in order to appreciate the influences which have gone to the making of the country as we find it today, its people, their religion and culture.

The area defined for historical purposes as South-East Asia is comprised of Burma, Thailand, Indo-China, Malaya and



the islands from the Andamans to New Guinea. Add to that India, Ceylon and China and you have the total area which we must consider. South-East Asia had well-defined indigenous cultures which were not lost in spite of cultural pressure from India and China. It is thought that, even in pre-historic times, trade was carried on extensively between South-East Asia and China through South China in the reign of the Emperor Wu (140-86 B.C.). In the first century A.D. the Chinese refer to the Kingdom of Funan (modern Cambodia) which, they say, was an Indianised state founded by a Brahmin. At the end of the second century A.D. the Chinese are mentioning Indianised states in the Malay Peninsula.

In the basin of the Menam Chao Phya, the large river on which Bangkok stands, the earliest Indian influences are to be found in the form of foundations of buildings and Buddhist sculpture and images of the second to the fourth century A.D. at Phong Tuk. Others have been found at Nakorn Pathom where there is the largest cetiya (pronounced che-dee) in Thailand about thirty miles south-west of Bangkok. From this we may deduce that Buddhism has been known in Thailand since this period, thus pre-dating the Thai themselves.

The Mon people were vassals of Funan, and the earliest Mon sites were also found in the Menam Chao Phya area, dating from 550 A.D. The Mon were in Lower Burma too. In the middle of the sixth century A.D. the Funan empire was

destroyed by one of its vassal kingdoms, thus giving rise to the Khmer empire. The Khmer kings extended their influence over the lower Mekong region as far as the Mon kingdom of Dvaravati in the seventh century A.D. and maintained good relations with the Cham. The Buddhism of Funan gave place to the Hinduism and Siva cult of the Khmer kings and ruling class. It is believed that the people did not abandon their religion and culture in favour of the new practices of the Court and upper strata of society.

During the seventh century A.D., after the fall of Funan, the kingdom of Srivijaya established itself in what we call Sumatra. The religion of this kingdom was Buddhist, and its influence extended into the Malay Peninsula. By the end of the thirteenth century A.D. it had been extinguished under pressure from Java, Thailand and the religion of Islam.

The Khmer consolidated their power in the regions of the lower Mekong and Mun rivers. The kingdom of Angkor was founded by a king who began to reign early in the ninth century A.D. By the eleventh century A.D. Khmer expansion had extended to the Menam Chao Phya valley, even including the Mon Kingdom of Dvaravati and part of the Malay Peninsula. In the north it went at least as far as Luang Prabang. During the twelfth century A.D. the Khmer conquered the kingdom of Champa for the first time and again in the thirteenth century A.D.

In Burma the first signs of recorded history are about 500 A.D. There were many wild tribes and a civilised people called the Pyu who had a capital in the seventh century A.D. and perhaps earlier. There are signs of Mahayana and Hinayana Buddhism and the cult of Vishnu. The Mon, according to their chronicles, founded a capital at Pegu in 825 A.D. Between the ninth and eleventh century A.D. the Burmese settled and their first king, Anawrahta, was crowned in 1044 A.D. at Pagan, although kings not recorded in history are claimed for centuries prior to that date.

In order that his people might be properly instructed in Buddhism, King Anawrahta defeated the Mon people and captured their sacred texts.<sup>1</sup> The religion which resulted was apparently a mixture of different forms of Buddhism, nat-worship, which is the local form of animism, and other cults. The Burmese and the Mon continued to struggle for supremacy for many centuries, but by the middle of the nineteenth century A.D. the Burmese had gained the mastery. It was in the twelfth century A.D. that bhikkhu came from Ceylon and others went from Burma to Ceylon and Hinayana Buddhism began to take precedence over that which had come with had come with the Mon texts. From Burma it spread to other parts of South-East Asia, including Thailand.

<sup>1</sup> *Historians believe that these texts were taken from Thaton in Lower Burma, but Thai archaeologists say that they were taken from Nakorn Pathom in Thailand.*

So far we have heard nothing of the Thai people but only of the forces acting and interacting on the territory which was finally established as theirs, and of empires rising and falling around it over the centuries since the beginning of recorded history.

From the sixth century B.C. onwards reference is made in Chinese records to the Thai people. In the seventh century A.D. we find them building up a kingdom, which was later known as Nanchao, in west and north-west Yunnan. By the ninth century A.D. they had conquered as far as the delta of the Irawaddy and were strong enough to make raids on Chinese territory. Before the end of the ninth century A.D. they had become a vassal state of the Chinese. They did not settle, however, and groups of them moved into Khmer, Mon and Burmese regions.

In the thirteenth century A.D. we find the Thai people founding the Shan States and Assam, possibly as a result of the weakening of Khmer influence. In 1238 A.D. the Thai defeated the Khmer at Sukhodaya (pronounced Sook-o-tie) which was the north-west capital of the Khmer empire. Before the end of the century this town had become the capital of the first Thai kingdom under Rama Kamheng (1283-1317 A.D.). Thai ruled over the fallen Pagan empire in Burma. In addition to conquering the Mon state of Lampun and thus founding the kingdom of Chiangmai in the north, they conquered the Mon

of the Menam Chao Phya area as well as the Khmer of the Mekong river.

While imposing their rule on their neighbours, it should be noted that the Thai themselves were greatly influenced by the peoples whom they subjugated. Rama Kamheng evolved a script from the Mon and Khmer scripts to enable them to use Sanskrit. The influence of Khmer art can be seen in many instances. As we have already seen, their particular form of Buddhism, emanating from Ceylon, came, if we are to believe the historians, through the Mon in Lower Burma and the Burmese.

Rama Kamheng was followed by two rulers who were immersed in religion rather than in affairs of state. The result was that a Thai prince founded a new capital at Ayudhya (pronounced A-yoot-ee-a) and in 1350 A.D. had himself crowned there under the name of Ramadhipati. He died in 1369 A.D. It was the task of the next two kings to subdue the kingdom of Snkhodaya to the level of a vassal state, transferring the seat of its power to Pitsanuloke.

For several centuries there was rivalry and fighting between Ayudhya and the northern kingdom of Chiengmai, which frequently found itself in the hands of the Burmese. This state of affairs continued until 1775 A.D. when the Thai captured Chiengmai from the Burmese, although the latter pressed for many years to regain the city. Meanwhile on their eastern

borders the Thai had to watch the Khmer. In 1431 A.D. they captured Angkor and the Khmer founded a new capital at Phnom Penh, which is still the capital of Cambodia. This marked the end of the great artistic achievement of the Khmer although it was not the end of their political strength.

In 1438 A.D. Sukhodaya became a province of Ayudhya. Pitsanuloke was made the capital in 1463 A.D., and it was not transferred back to Ayudhya until 1488 A.D. The sixteenth century A.D. sees the beginning of the struggle for power between Ayudhya and Burma, a struggle which continued until the sack of Ayudhya by the Burmese in 1767 A.D.

In the same year Phya Taksin, a half Chinese general who had escaped from Ayudhya, set up a new capital in Thonburi, on the Menam Chao Phya opposite Bangkok, which did not, of course, exist at that time. Phya Taksin had himself crowned. Gradually he succeeded in defeating the Burmese in various parts of Thailand and reuniting the country. The strain imposed on him was so great that he became mentally deranged. This led to a rebellion at Ayudhya against him.

General Chao Phya Chakri who had become more and more responsible for affairs of state during the king's illness, was able to quell the rebellion. King Taksin was killed, and in 1782 A.D. General Chakri became the first king of the present dynasty with his capital in Bangkok. His title is Somdej Phra Buddha Yot Fa Chulalok, he is known as Rama I



and he reigned until 1809 A.D. His successors were:

Somdej Phra Buddha Loes La Nabhalai,

Rama II, son of Rama I, 1809-1824 A.D.

Shmdej Phra Nang Klao,

Rama III, son of Rama II, 1824-1851 A.D.

Somdej Phra Chom Klao (King Mongkut)

Rama IV, son of Rama II, 1851-1868 A.D.

Somdej Phra Chula Chom Klao (King Chulalongkorn)

Rama V, son of Rama IV, 1868-1910 A.D.

Somdej Phra Mongkut Klao (King Vajiravudh)

Rama VI, son of Rama V, 1910-1925 A.D.

Somdej Phra Pok Klao (King Prajadhipok)

Rama VII, son of Rama V, 1925-1935 A.D.

Somdej Phra Poramindara Maha Ananda Mahidol

Rama VIII, nephew of Rama VII, 1935-1946 A.D.

His Majesty Somdej Phra Poramandara Maha Pumipol  
Aduldej is the present constitutional monarch of Thailand.

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To summarise the religious thread running through the history of South-East Asia and hence affecting Thailand and the Thai people, we know that there were Indian influences in early

times but we have to wait for trustworthy evidence until the fifth century A.D. when we find that Buddhism and the cults of Siva and Harihara were both practised in Funan. Inscriptions in Champa indicated Siva-worship and the fifth century A.D. gives traces of Mahayana Buddhism in the Malay Peninsula and Brahmin and Buddhist finds in Borneo, whilst Java gives signs of Brahminism. In the seventh century A.D. there was an important centre of Mahayana Buddhism in Sumatra, but there were also traces of Hinayana Buddhism. In the latter half of the eighth century A.D. Mahayana Buddhism spread throughout South-East Asia. In the eighth, ninth and tenth centuries A.D. in Java there were the Siva cult and Mahayana Buddhism. Sumatra was still a great centre of Buddhism in the eleventh century A.D. In Java in the thirteenth century A.D. the religious practices were united in the cult of Siva-Buddha. By the middle of the thirteenth century A.D. Islam was already gaining hold in Sumatra, and we hear of it in Java in the sixteenth century. Hinduism and the cults of Siva and Vishnu were practised in the kingdom of the Khmer by the Kings but the people practised their own form of animism and ancestor-worship, and in the tenth century A.D. we hear of Buddhism. In the twelfth century A.D. a Khmer prince adopted Theravada or Hinayana Buddhism and is believed to have lived as a bhikkhu in Burma. Itinerant bhikkhu brought the religion to the Menam Chao Phya area and on to Cambo-

dia where it became the principal religion. In the eleventh century A.D. it is said that in Burma Hinayana Buddhism was brought from Thaton to Pagan, although, as we have already seen, Thai archaeologists prefer the view that it went from Nakorn Pathom to Pagan. This Hinayana Buddhism in Burma is believed to have been mixed with Mahayana Buddhism and also with the practice of nat-worship. In this century, too, Ceylon was becoming the principal centre of Theravada Buddhism. Towards the end of the twelfth century A.D. Sinhalese Buddhism was introduced into Burma and took precedence over the other form at Pagan. Bhikkhu were ordained in Ceylon and, as we have already seen, the new form of Buddhism spread to the people of Thailand, Laos and Cambodia.

Now in the middle of the twentieth century of the Christian era, with so many traditions giving place to new thoughts, Buddhism is still a strong influence in Thailand. This religion believes in the ultimate salvation of all living things from suffering and ignorance which Gotama, the Buddha, discerned as the principle feature of life as we know it. This salvation or "enlightenment" (Buddha means The Enlightened One) can be achieved by the practice of goodness as described in the Eightfold Path of Virtue. Living things must pass through countless re-births in different forms, reaching a higher or lower state of being according to the goodness or badness of their actions in previous lives. Through goodness

and wisdom all living things reach Nirvana, the state of eternal enlightenmeat or happiness.

\* \* \*

It would be impossible to live long in Thailand without hearing the term "to make merit." The people make merit in various ways, perhaps the most difficult being the observance of "metta" which is the extension of "loving-kindness" to all living things. The rich man may build a new temple, thereby gaining more merit than by repairing an old one according to the modern way of thinking. This is a pity because it means that old structures of charm are allowed to fall into disrepair. Giving alms to beggars is a form of merit-making, but one does not have this opportunity very often as there are not many beggars in Thailand. Attendance at a service in the temple gains merit. It is possible to make merit every morning by giving food to the bhikkhu who leave the wats in the morning light carrying their alms bowls. Perhaps the most charming way of making merit is by releasing a bird from its cage. Outside certain wats on holy days people bring caged birds. It is possible to buy one for a few units of local currency, open the door of the cage and let it fly away.

The supreme form of making merit is to enter the priesthood. The male members of the population may become

samanera (pronounced sa-ma-nain) or novices if they are under twenty and bhikkhu if they are over age. It is the custom to enter for a period of three months or longer, but, of course, many spend years or all their lives in the Order. Occasionally a man spends only a few weeks. Ordination is not confined to the few nor to the very young. I have heard of several university professors, all married men, who have entered the Order for the three months period.

I once attended the ordination of a rich man's son in one of the Royal wats. When I arrived his head had already been shaved and he was wearing a beautiful cope of fine lace and gold thread held round the waist by a gold belt. His relatives and friends were there with gifts for his use during his stay in the wat.

The requisites of a bhikkhu are simple for he has no right to any property but his three articles of clothing, iron alms bowl, razor, needle, girdle and filter, the last for water because he must not drink any living organism along with the water.

The young man walked three times round the wat under a large umbrella with his relatives and friends bearing the gifts behind him. The latter then carried the gifts into the Bot (pronounced like 'boat') or hall for the ordination and other holy ceremonies, while he stood outside on the steps symbolically throwing away all his worldly goods in the form of small coins.

Once inside, his yellow garments were presented to him on a tray in the presence of a council of bhikkhu. He moved at least one arm's length away from the council with two bhikkhu who asked him such questions as whether he was a debtor, had all his articles for use as a bhikkhu, whether his relatives (and in the case of an official, the King) agreed to his becoming a bhikkhu and whether he suffered from any disease. The answers being satisfactory, they returned and the rich cope and gold belt had given place to the simple robes of the bhikkhu. These are made of very thin material in a bright yellow colour. The robe is made from many pieces because the bhikkhu was supposed to collect such rags and scraps of cloth as he could find and sew them into a robe. An old bhikkhu, specially appointed to conduct ordination ceremonies in that district, then read to the young man the precepts of the Dharma, the Buddhist Law.

A bhikkhu must observe two hundred and twenty-seven rules of which perhaps the most important are that he must not kill (and this prevents him from defending himself in case he should kill), he must have no contact with women, he must not boast and particularly he must not boast that he is like Buddha, he must not tell lies and while he should certainly not steal at all, a theft of less than one unit of local currency or the equivalent would not require him to disrobe.

The traditional day of a bhikkhu can be found in the villages rather than in Bangkok where amendments must of



necessity be made to a way of life based on the life of the Lord Buddha 2,500 years ago. After dressing, he meditates for half an hour and goes into the Bot to recite the sutras or prayers. (In Bangkok this is done about nine o'clock after the first meal of the day) He cleans the Bot with a broom which must be very soft in case he should kill the ants which run about on floors in the tropics.

At the first light of morning, as soon as he can distinguish the colour of the leaves on the trees or can read the lines on his palm, he goes forth with his alms bowl. If someone says to him, "If you need anything, please tell me", he may ask but otherwise not. He may accept nothing from the hand of a woman direct, and he is not allowed to eat anything unless it has been offered to him in case he should become greedy. The only things he may take for himself direct are his toothbrush and water. The village people present food outside their houses and also take it to the wat where they are blessed for their offerings.

After eating, the bhikkhu study the sacred texts, teach or do manual work such as repairing the buildings of the wat. In the north-east of Thailand I have seen the abbot of a wat himself helping the villagers to build a bridge and another digging a well with them. At eleven o'clock the big drum is beaten, acting like a village clock, and people come again with food for the second and last meal of the day which must be

finished before noon. After that the bhikkhu may only drink. They rest for a little and once more study or work. The last prayers are said at five o'clock.

\* \* \*

Holy Days are calculated by a lunar system. The month is divided into two parts, the bright and the dark according to the moon. Shaving Day is once a month and falls one day in advance of the Holy Day.

It is necessary to understand how the years are calculated in Buddhist countries. In Thailand it is held that the Lord Buddha died five hundred and forty three years before the birth of Christ, so that this number must be deducted from the Buddhist year in order to find the equivalent year. Thus 2,500 B.E. (Buddhist Era) is the same as 1957 A.D. There is not general agreement in the Buddhist world about the exact year of the death of the Lord Buddha.

\* \* \*

The Buddhist church in Thailand has its own organisation. Every bhikkhu is a member of the Sangha or Order, the head of which is called the Sangharaja who might be described as the patriarch or even as the Prince of the Order. There are



four minister under him, one each in charge of administration, education, information and public works such as rebuilding and repairing of wats. The country is divided for religious administration into nine parts each consisting of six province a province in this case being a very small area of land. There is an inspector in charge of each part and he carries out his inspection once a month. Each province has a head; the provinces are divided into districts, each with its own head. The districts in turn are subdivided into what we might call parishes, again with a head for each. Lastly there is the wat with an abbot in charge of it. The Sangharaja is usually chosen from the abbots.

\* \* \*

What exactly do we mean by a wat? It is not one building but a group of them. The principal building is called the Bot and it usually faces east. This approximates to the Christian church and is the most sacred part of the wat. Somewhere around the outside of the Bot or on its walls will be found the sima (pronounced see-ma) or eight boundary stones enclosing the sacred area. Within this area the most profound rites, such as ordination, are performed. In certain wats in the north of Thailand the Bot is regarded as being so sacred that women

not allowed to enter it. There is usually one Vihara (pronounced wee-han), sometimes several, and this might be regarded as the Christian equivalent of a side-chapel. Sometimes there is a Mandhapa (pronounced Mondop) or roof for covering sacred relics or housing the library, and there is yet another kind of building called Phra Sad. It is necessary to remove the shoes before entering any of those buildings. If one attends a service, one must keep oneself below the level of the bhikkhu if possible and never point the toes in their direction.

Most wats of any size have a library where the sacred texts are kept, and there are usually cetiya about which I shall say more later. There is always a belfry within the wat and sometimes drums for summoning the bhikkhu to prayer and food. Often there are cloisters or galleries lined with images of the Buddha and pavilions open on four sides where people rest or distribute food the bhikkhu. This will always take place before noon as they must not eat after that hour.

It is common to have a school within the wat for the bhikkhu, for children or for both. Bangkok wats frequently seem to be used as boarding-schools for boys from the provinces who act as helpers to the bhikkhu in return for their education, board and lodging. They are known as luksit. The luksit carry money for the bhikkhu who are not allowed to handle it. They perform other small tasks and wear ordinary clothes as opposed to the nera who wear the yellow robe. The bhikkhu

and *nera* have their cells or living quarters in one part of the grounds, separate from the religious buildings, set out in short "streets" in the larger wats, which seem like small villages accordingly.

Sometimes there are nuns, wearing white robes, attached to the wats. In Thailand the *chee* or nun is usually an elderly spinster or widow who gives some money to the wat in return for food and accommodation. She is really using the wat as a kind of eventide home where she can pass her last days peacefully under the shelter of the Buddha. Sometimes lay people occupy a cell for a short time, especially if they are practising meditation.

Architecturally the Bot and Vihara always follow the same style. The brick walls of the rectangular buildings are white-washed, the slightly concave roofs sloping and covered with glazed tiles, usually brown, green or navy blue, sometimes in several layers each terminated by a sharp horn-like decoration. This is called a *chaw-fa* and no satisfactory explanation seems to be available for it, but it may have its origin in some magical conception pre-dating Buddhism or it may be the head of the serpent formalised. Floors are often made of marble, cool under the feet, and ceilings are of decorated wood. Visitors to Bangkok often seem to think that the Bot has to be built in the form of a cross. This is not so. It may be built that way but often it consists of a nave, sometimes with a pillared aisle

on either side. The latter style may occur if the Bot has been enlarged during a reconstruction of the wat. Small chips of coloured glass are chiefly used as ornamentation on pillars, doors, windows, on altar tables and the base of images. The effect is most foreign to the western eye. The Vihara does not differ materially from the Bot with the exception of the *sima*. In spite of this architectural unity, there is no monotony in the wats as a whole as will be seen from the short essays which follow on individual wats. I might even say that one of their chief characteristics is their difference one from another.

A wat is not only a place of worship, home of religious devotees and crematorium. It is also in Thailand a centre of social life, and in the community occupies a place somewhat similar to that of the mediaeval Church in Europe. In addition to religious festivals, fairs are held at the wats with swings and roundabouts. Loudspeakers blare modern jazz and there is fun for everyone. In the north of Thailand towards evening most colourful processions can be seen going to the wat bearing gifts or a youth for ordination.

Once far south of Bangkok I came across a fair in full swing at a country wat. They were raising money to rebuild it. The entire neighbourhood was there from little boys with shaven heads and decorated top-knots wearing traditional dress to the cows with their horns tied up in brightly coloured decorations. This may have had some reference to the story of

the Buddha's first meditation at the age of five months when he was taken to see a ploughing festival and the animals were decorated with flowers. There appeared to be no question of selling the cows at this fair which I attended; they had been brought to see the fun. It was but right that foreigners should pay toll to the wat for this fine spectacle and we were led off, willing enough victims, to see the abbot.

During the wet season from the full moon of the eighth lunar month to the full moon of the eleventh lunar month the bhikkhu are supposed to stay in wats as possible and not so many of them are seen about. The disciples of the Buddha slept under trees during their preaching journeys, but in the wet season he allowed them to shelter in huts built near their temples. After the parching of the dry season the rain causes everything to grow and creatures which have been sheltering from the dry heat come out. The Buddha forbade his disciples to walk outside their huts lest they should tread on living things and growing plants. Many parts of the country are not easily accessible during the rain so it is an appropriate time for detachment from the world for a period of meditation.

At the end of this Buddhist Lent, as it is sometimes called, there is a ceremony known as kathina (pronounced ka-teen). People go in procession to the wats to present new robes to the bhikkhu. The abbot receives the gifts and the Sangha gives permission to individual bhikkhu to wear them. In one

of the Buddhist sects in Thailand only a piece of white cloth is presented. The bhikkhu must cut the cloth into small pieces, sew and dye it and have it ready to wear that evening. Others accept the robes already dyed and made up. It is the custom for the reigning monarch to go in person to certain wats for the kathina ceremony and to send delegates to others. I was told by a former bhikkhu that His Majesty presented gifts at five o'clock. As soon as he left, everyone began to work, assisted by lay people. In the evening there is a service in the Bot at which the bhikkhu chant a thanksgiving for the gifts.

\* \* \*

Reference has been made to the sacred texts which are kept in the library of the wat. These consist of thin strips of palm leaf specially prepared. They are cream coloured and usually not longer than about twenty-one and a half inches and about two and a quarter in width. Originally the texts were inscribed on them in Cambodian script with an iron stylus of needle sharpness. Now both Cambodian and Thai script are used and stamped on to the palm leaf by an ordinary printing machine. In Bangkok at the rear of a shop where every sort of religious effect is sold, there is a large printing works turning out thousands of palm leaf texts. The old way seems more romantic, but then, no doubt, so do illuminated parchments and quill pens.

The iron needle left only a faint impression and, in order to bring this up, the leaf was covered with soot. The leaf was then rubbed clean with sand and the soot-blackened script showed up. A leaf is printed on both sides and takes about five lines on each side. The leaves are tied up in bundles which are kept wrapped in special cloths. The Thai people specialised in making black and gold lacquered bookcases for the sacred books and many fine specimens can be seen in the National Museum.

\* \* \*

Around the courtyards of the wats there are often Chinese stone figures and Chinese porcelain tiles are inlaid in walls. Some say that they were brought as ballast in ships coming from China to pick up cargoes of rice, others say they were presents from the Chinese to the King and they have also been referred to as taxes. The first two kings of the present dynasty (1782-1824 A.D.) were directly engaged in trade, building junks and exporting produce to China. The royal monopoly in trade began in the second reign to give place to taxation as a means of finding revenue. It is reasonable to suppose that traders might send gifts for the wats which were then being built, in order to ensure a continuance of trade with the all-powerful monarchs. Barter was a common thing in those days and it is also not impossible that the Chinese preferred to pay their trade taxes

to the King of Siam in the form of ornamental figures and tiles rather than in cash. It is also said that the figures were brought by Chinese merchants as gifts to influential people or merchants who did not wish to accommodate such things in their houses or gardens or had no space for them and so presented them to the wats.

\* \* \*

Cetiya, already mentioned, are also found in the courtyards. The origin of this was doubtless the mound of earth used to cover the remains of the dead. From this it has developed into an ornamental structure covering actual ashes of the Buddha, his relics, sacred texts or an image. In more recent times people have placed the ashes of their deceased relatives in cetiya in order to gain merit. There are two main types, one called cetiya and the other prang. The former is bell-shaped, either round or rectangular in terraces diminishing in size from the base upwards, and surmounted by a tapering spire, the two main parts being separated by a surrounding gallery. The prang type derives from the Hindu sikhara, the mountain peak where the Hindu gods live. Thus we see the influence of Khmer art in Bangkok where there are many prang similar to the towers of Angkor Wat.



In addition to the prang and cetiya there is the Mandapa and also the Phra Sad. The former is an ornamental roof supported by pillars and used to cover a sacred relic or texts. The dictionary defines Phra Sed as "a lofty platform, a building on high foundations, a terrace, a palace." It is always a royal building and is usually in the shape of a Greek cross.

\* \* \*

In certain wats an odd little figure called a Rishi can be seen. The Rishi are of Brahmin origin, thus pre-dating Buddhism. They were poets who wrote the ancient hymns, known as Rigveda, in praise of the gods of sun, wind and so on. That is the Rishi of legend, but the Rishi were also people who practised penance, including meditation and self-torture. They took strange vows and lived in the forest. For the most part they were benevolent, but there were cases of less kindly types. They could bless people, but they could also curse them. Lord Buddha was said to have converted a large number of Rishi so that they abandoned their practices.

The naga or serpent is a very common motif around religious buildings in Thailand. It also appears in Cambodia. When I look at a naga in Thailand and at one in Cambodia,

I am not sure whether I am looking at the same animal. The naga of the Khmer is supposed to derive from the Khmer belief that their king had a mythical union with a naga princess. As we have seen, Khmer art influenced Thai art. On the other hand the serpent, perhaps a cobra, plays its part in the Buddhist story. A serpent was supposed to have appeared to the Buddha in the form of a youth who was admitted to the Order. One day while the serpent was asleep, he appeared in his true colours and frightened the bhikkhu. After that Buddha issued an order forbidding the admission of animals to the Order. There is the other story that after his enlightenment, while Buddha was sitting under a tree, it rained for seven days and seven nights so that the earth was flooded all round him. A serpent came, raised him above the flood on its coils and spread its hood over his head to keep him dry.

The garouda or eagle is also commonly seen, often as a decoration with outspread wings each of which is grasping, as if they were hands, a serpent. The story goes that the naga and the garouda had a bet about the colour of a horse. The garouda said it was white and the naga said it was black. It was in fact white, and when the naga realised this, it decided to cheat. It turned its little nagas into flies and told them to go and cover the horse's tail to make it look black. It invited the garouda to inspect the horse while the light was dim and as a result of the flies and the poor light, the garouda conceded

that the horse was black. Later on when it discovered that it had been cheated, it was so cross that it ate the little nagas.

\* \* \*

The Ramakian is the Thai version of the Indian Ramayana legend and is used as a subject for paintings and sculpture. There are different versions but I think it will suffice here if I say that the god Vishnu came down to earth to fight the powers of evil. In his journey over the earth he was assisted by the monkey-god, Hanuman.

\* \* \*

The subject of iconography and the casting of images are important ones in considering the practice of Buddhism in Thailand. Ask for the names of artists and you will find none. The images were made by people for the glory of the religion, working sometimes in stone or stucco but chiefly in bronze. Old metal, such as coins and silver bowls, is melted. A clay image is made and the features delineated, after which special wax is put over the clay. The wax is then covered with cow dung to strengthen the figure. The image is studded with nails and covered with another layer of clay before being put into a

wire frame. Clay is put over the wire and the image is baked in a furnace before the metal is poured into the hollow inside and left to harden. The clay is then removed and the figure polished. It is greatly to the credit of the Thai craftsmen that they were able to spread the metal both thinly and evenly, in the accredited manner, even long ago and in making the very largest images.

The earliest images, in stone, belong to the Dvaravati period of the Mon people between the sixth and eighth century A.D. The inspiration here was the post-Gupta art of India. The principal influence from the eighth to the thirteenth century A.D. came from the Khmer, also for the most part in stone. When the Thai people came to make their own images, they were not unnaturally influenced by both styles. Nevertheless Thai images are neither Indian nor Khmer. They are Thai.

It is necessary to distinguish the various periods in order to appreciate the styles. There is the earlier Chiengsen period from the eleventh to the thirteenth century A.D. and the later Chiengsen period from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century A.D. The images of the earlier type have the legs crossed, bulging eyes and protruding lips, rounded head and large curls. In the later type the right leg rests on the left, the head is elongated by a torch and the curls are smaller. The cloth over the left shoulder almost touches the hand instead of stopping above the left nipple as in the earlier images.

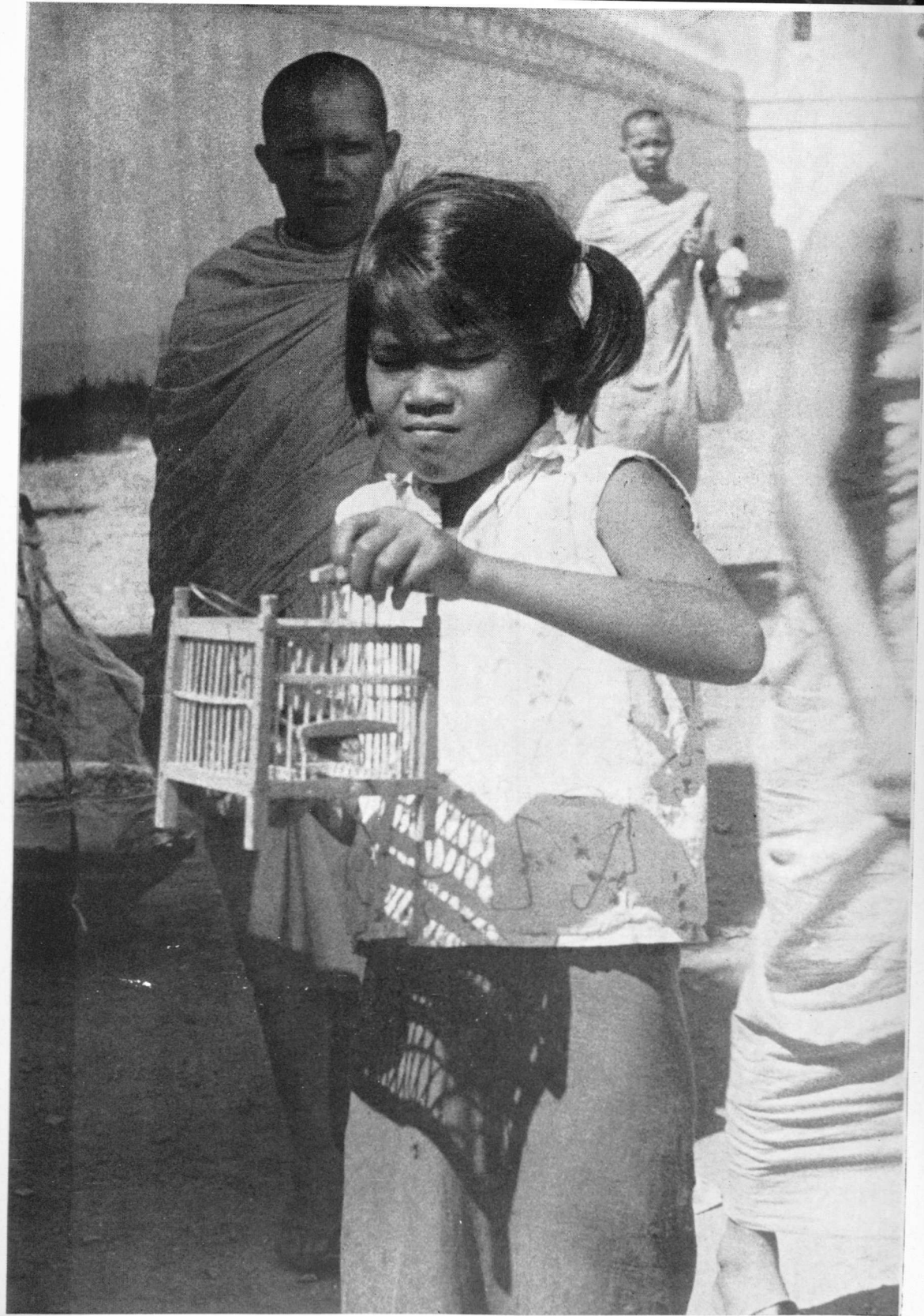
The Sukhodaya period marks the great flowering of this art in Thailand from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century A.D. and it is justly famous for the magnificence of its walking Buddhas, a form which up to that time had been rendered only in relief. The images of this period express the spirit of Buddhism in a way that no others do, concentrating as they do on the period after the Buddha's enlightenment. They are inspired by nature rather than by previous styles, and at the same time conform to the allusions in the Pali texts and Sanskrit poetry, giving rise to the arched eyebrows, curved nose, elongated earlobes, flat soles and projecting heels.

From the thirteenth to the fifteenth century A.D. there was the U'thong period which combined the styles of Dvaravati, Cambodia and Sukhodaya. The flowing lines of Sukhodaya have given place to a stiff and meditative posture. The face is broad and the nose flat. The Ayudhya period began in 1350 A.D. and continued until 1767 A.D. The styles were principally influenced by U'thong and a little by Sukhodaya. The Ayudhya style proper evolved towards the end of the sixteenth century A.D. when the art was already declining. There is an ornamental head-dress and pointed earrings, the face has lost its serenity and the figure is stiff. If the image has one hand raised it signifies the Lord Buddha forbidding his relatives to fight; two hands raised are significant of subduing the ocean, a symbol for human passions. The decline came when form gave place to ornamentation in the later Ayudhya period.

During the Ratnakosin or Bangkok period from 1782 A.D. with the building of the Bangkok wats, images were brought from all parts of the country to the new capital. Creative power was crushed in favour of copying old images and has been given no incentive to revival until recent years.

That covers the main divisions of this art, but it must be understood that there was a great deal of overlapping between the different periods. Occasionally people take exception to the feminine tendency in the lines of the images, thinking of the Buddha as a man. The spiritual quality of the images has perhaps been heightened by this failure to delineate the sex clearly.





*Releasing Birds*



*Sima, Wat Phra Keoh*





*Rishi reading the sacred texts*



*Garouda*





*Naga*



*Prang, Wat Mahadhatu*

## WAT PHRA KEOH

or

### *The Temple Of The Emerald Buddha*

**W**AT PHRA KEOH, OR THE Temple of the Emerald Buddha, is the Chapel Royal and stands within the precincts of the Grand Palace in Bangkok. It was built in 1785 A.D. by King Rama I (1782-1809 A.D.).

This is one of the most spectacular groups of buildings to be found anywhere in the world. It is open to tourists by arrangement with the authorities on certain days and then it is like any other monument on show for an hour to a group of politely interested people. But go on Sunday morning and you will see something very different.

Outside the east gate there is a great buying and selling. Religious pictures are thrust into your hand almost before you get out of your car, someone else wants you to buy a bunch of flowers for the Buddha, and you must pay a little money to release a pair of birds from their cage.

If you have a camera, you have to pay a negligible sum to enable you to take photographs inside. If you are wearing short sleeves, you may go in, but, if your sleeves are long and rolled up, you are an untidy fellow and the guard will tell you to roll them down.

Thus properly dressed and equipped you pass inside along with the country people who have come to pay their respects, many of them wearing the traditional dress. You will wander and gaze until, exhausted by the heat and the complexity of the scene, you will at last retire.

There is one large courtyard enclosed on the east, south and west by a gallery with paintings of the Ramakian story, the Thai version of the Indian Ramayana legend. This was first painted in the reign of King Rama I, but the original paintings were destroyed by damp, and the painting of the present murals was begun in 1927 A.D. They are now kept in good condition. The traditional style has been subject to some western influence.

Great demons, over twenty feet high, stand on either side of the entrances to the courtyard both from the road and the Palace. They are the guardians of the wat. Their snarling fangs and vivid colours might well strike terror to the heart of the miscreant.

In front of the east gate is a flight of stone steps leading up to a large terrace. On it are very charming little gilded figures, half-human and half-bird. The females are called kinnaree and the males kinnara or kinnon. On either side of the steps there is a gilded cetiya supported by giants and monkeys in bright colours, knees bent sideways to support the weight they carry on their up-turned hands.



In the centre of this terrace there stands a building known to western people as the Pantheon and to the Thai as Phra Sad Phra Dheb Bidorn. It was built in 1855 A.D. and, as a result of partial destruction by fire, had to be renewed in 1903 A.D. It contains statues of the first seven kings of the present dynasty. Blue and red mingle on the exterior walls, giving a mauve effect. A prang rises from the orange and green tiled roof.

West of the Pantheon is a Mandhapa, a black roof, gilded and touched with red, over a square foundation, rising in ornamental tiers to a tapering spire and supported by pillars decorated with glass mosaic. It was built as a library for the sacred texts. Another library in a different style was built on a lower level in the north-east corner of the grounds. At each corner of the Mandhapa is a stone figure of the Javanese style.

The great Golden Cetiya lies to the west of the Mandhapa, forming the third in the extraordinary group of buildings on this terrace. The cetiya is round with pieces built out over the four entrances, a small cetiya rising above each of them.

On the north side of the Mandhapa there is a model of Angkor Wat, the famous temple of the Khmer empire in Cambodia.

In the south-west part of the courtyard on a lower level behind the Bot a rishi or hermit, which is considered a fine example of modern Thai bronze casting from the time of King

Rama III, sits on a raised pedestal. He has his fair share of adulation.

South of the Pantheon and on a level below it is the Bot. This was built in the reign of King Rama I for the Emerald Buddha when it was brought from Thonburi to Bangkok in 1782 A.D. The Bot is about one hundred and eighty feet long, including the east and west porches, and about eighty feet wide. The roof is navy blue and so beautifully proportioned that, seen from a distance, it almost seems to float on the air. The walls are covered with gilded glass mosaic, the pillars supporting the roof are inlaid with coloured glass mosaic, and the building is surrounded by a wall of gently coloured porcelain tiles. The gilded sima are covered by ornate structures.

On a Sunday morning the eastern porch is full of people entering and leaving the Bot. Shoes in neat rows await the return of their owners. All the doors of the Bot are inlaid with mother of pearl and the centre one is opened only for the King.

Inside the Bot is full of worshippers, seated on the floor or praying. Behind the glass screens which are placed in front of the two side doors there are two drums. They are made of bronze and little models of frogs are fixed to the top of them. The drums are prehistoric and are now beaten during important ceremonies.

The walls of the Bot are covered with paintings depicting the life of the Lord Buddha and the Buddhist world.

At the western end of the Bot is the high altar. At ground level there are many ornaments, including a clock which is said to have been presented by Queen Victoria, probably to King Chulalongkorn. Above these to right and left are Buddha images in royal vestments. Soaring above them, impressive by the mere fact of its smallness at that height, is the Emerald Buddha.

In Thai the Emerald Buddha is known as Phra Maha Manee Ratana Patimakorn Keoh Morakot. It is not really made of emerald but of dark green jade of a variety said to be found only in Siberia and near the borders of China and Burma. It is about twenty-one and a half inches high and fifteen and a half inches from knee to the forehead, but in 1854 A.D. one large diamond was substituted for these by King Rama IV.

The actual origin of this image is not known, but expert opinion has apparently in recent years decided that it belongs to the later Chiengsen period (thirteenth to sixteenth century A.D.). It is first heard of in Chiengrai in the North of Thailand where it was covered with cement and coated over with gold leaf to prevent its discovery by hostile neighbours. It was placed in a cetiya in Wat Phra Keoh in Chiengrai.

In 1434 A.D. a thunderstorm destroyed the cetiya and the Buddha was moved to another part of the wat. Very soon afterwards the cement cracked, revealing the jade image inside. The matter was reported to the King of Chiengmai who gave

orders that the image was to be conveyed by elephant to Chiengmai. In the square of Lampang the elephant stopped and refused to proceed. The King of Chiengmai decided to leave the image in Lampang where the people built Wat Phra Keoh Don Tao for it. It remained there for thirty-two years. The King of Chiengmai then had the image removed to Wat Cetiya Luang in Chiengmai where it remained for eighty-four years.

Chiengmai came under the dominion of Laos in 1551 A.D. and the image was transferred to the Laos capital, Luang Prabang. 1564 A.D. brought threats of trouble from Burma and the capital moved to Vientiane and the image along with it. There was trouble between King Tak Sin of Thonburi and the King of Laos in 1778 A.D. General Chakri, who later became King Rama I, defeated the King of Laos and brought the image to Thonburi where it was placed in Phra Keoh Hall which is now in the compound of the Naval Headquarters next to Wat Arun.

The image was moved from Thonburi to Bangkok by King Rama I in 1782 A.D. The King had two garments made for it, one for the hot season and one for the wet. King Rama III added a garment for the dry season and raised the golden platform on which the image rests to its present of thirty-four feet.

On Sunday afternoon, February 26th, 1956, I went to the Temple of the Emerald Buddha with my husband and a

friend. There was a great bustle outside the east gate and inside bands were playing in the gallery.

We walked to the Bot. The centre door was open and officials were seated in the eastern porch. We stood just opposite the centre door looking up into the Bot with the Emerald Buddha in front of us.

In a few minutes His Majesty, wearing a white suit, arrived, accompanied by the Palace guards with their white jackets, blue chong-kra-ben (a kind of skirt caught up between the legs and fastened behind), black shoes and stockings and black helmets patterned with yellow and with a flap over the nape of the neck. His Majesty entered the Bot with Brahmin priests and officials.

Presently we saw His Majesty standing behind the image where he had arrived after climbing up the steps behind it. He removed the winter or dry season garments, which more or less cover the image, and the head-dress, to the accompaniment of fanfares from a band behind us and the gentle tinkling of the temple bells blowing in the warm wind on all the roofs.

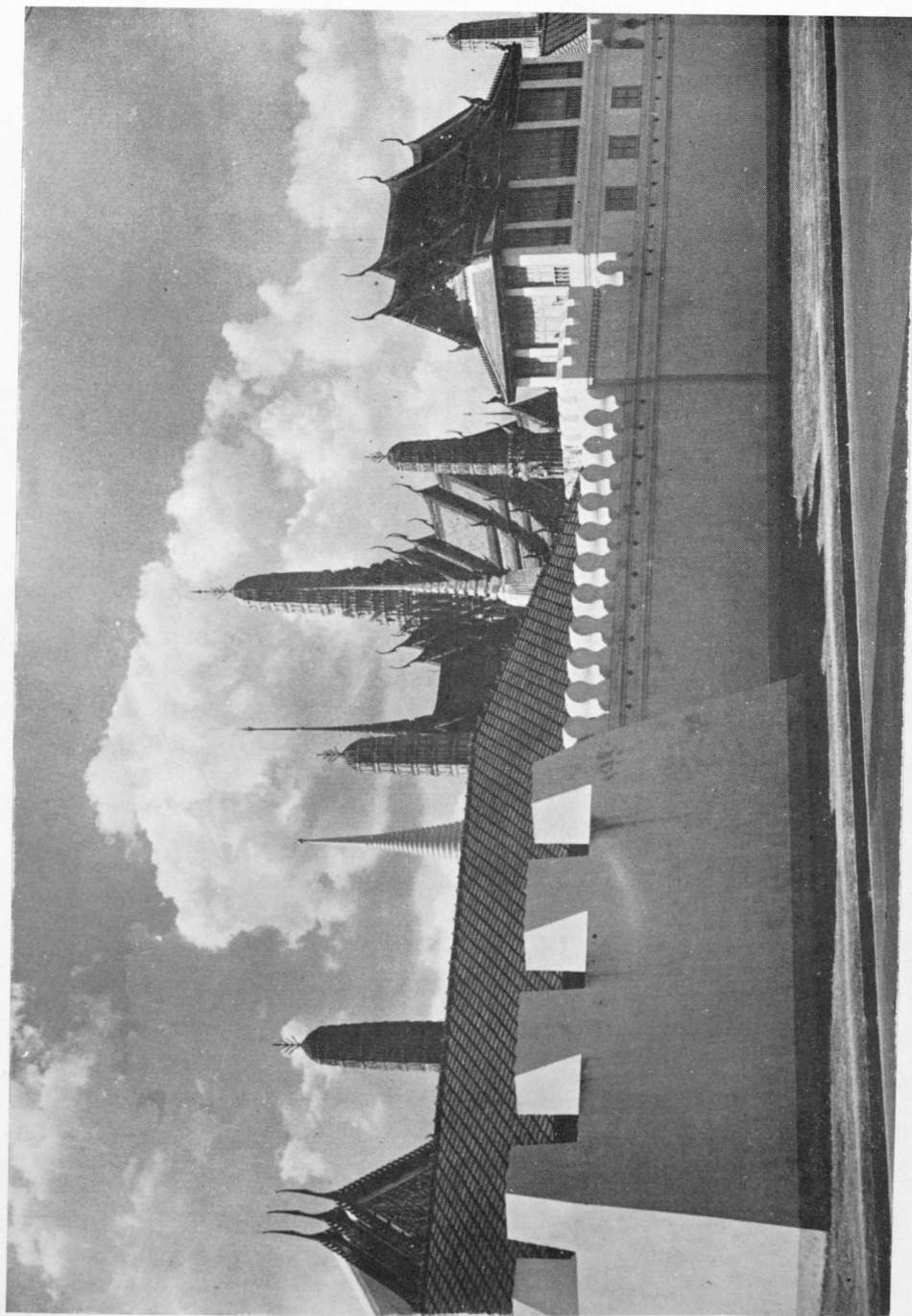
His Majesty then cleaned the image with a pure white cloth. This he did most carefully. He then placed on the head the ornament for the wet season, higher and more elaborate than the one he had removed. We could not see him descend the staircase behind the golden throne, but in a few minutes we saw him back at floor level.

Two officials appeared beside the image to complete the dressing. They tied the ornamental breastplate round the neck, and ornaments were tied round the arms, waist, wrists and knees.

The ceremony occupied quite a long time and meanwhile on the floor of the Bot the officials passed lighted candles round in a circle from hand to hand with a curious thrice-made gesture outwards from the elbows while the band kept up its fanfares and the temple bells their tinkling.

When all was done His Majesty left the Bot. In a few moments we were standing shoeless in the magnificent building with devout people prostrate all over the floor where their King had walked under the Emerald Buddha.





*Wat Phra Keoh*

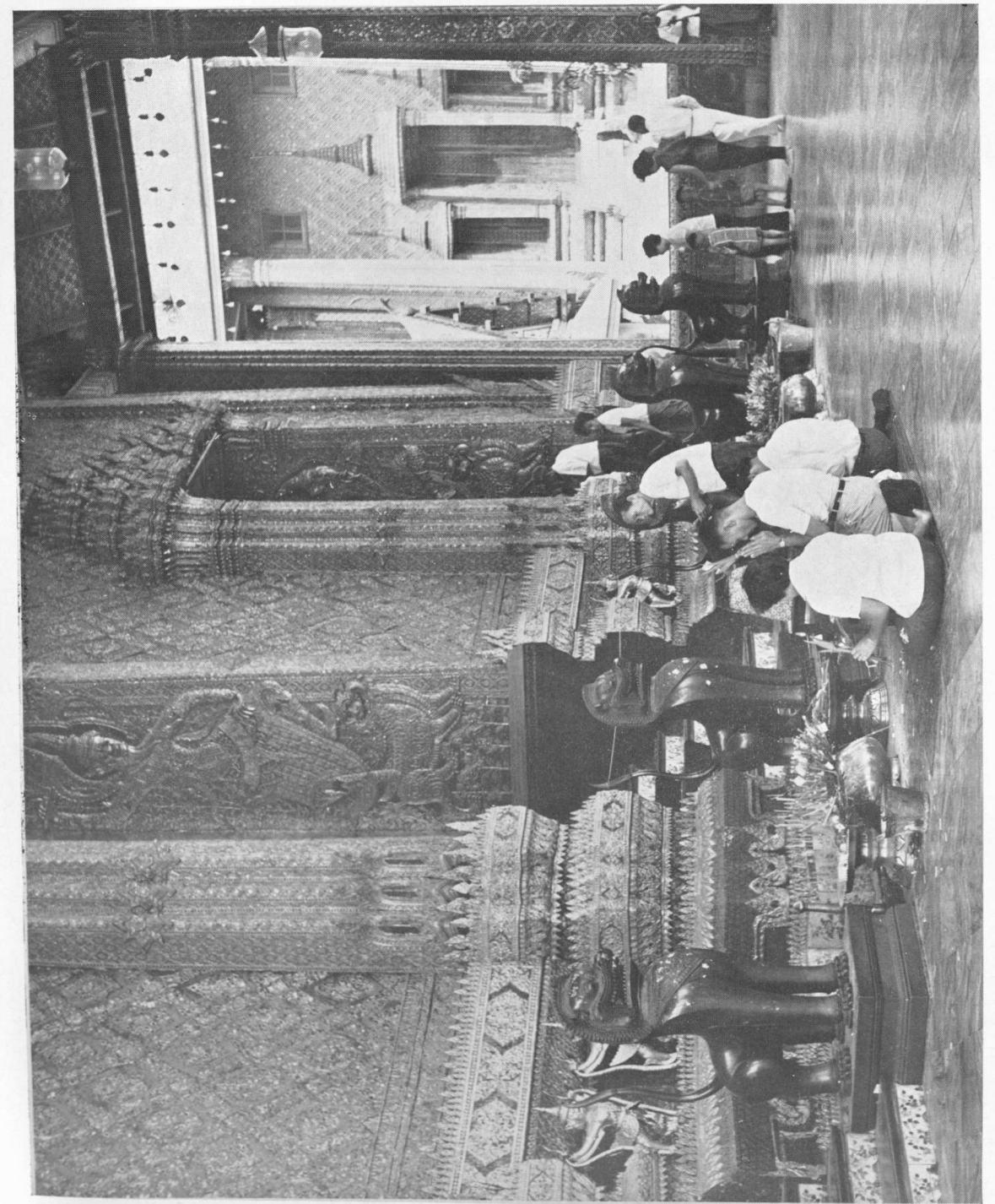


*Mural*





*The Bot*



*The entrance to the Bot*





*Mural*



*The Rishi has his fair share of adulation*





*A Demon over twenty feet high*

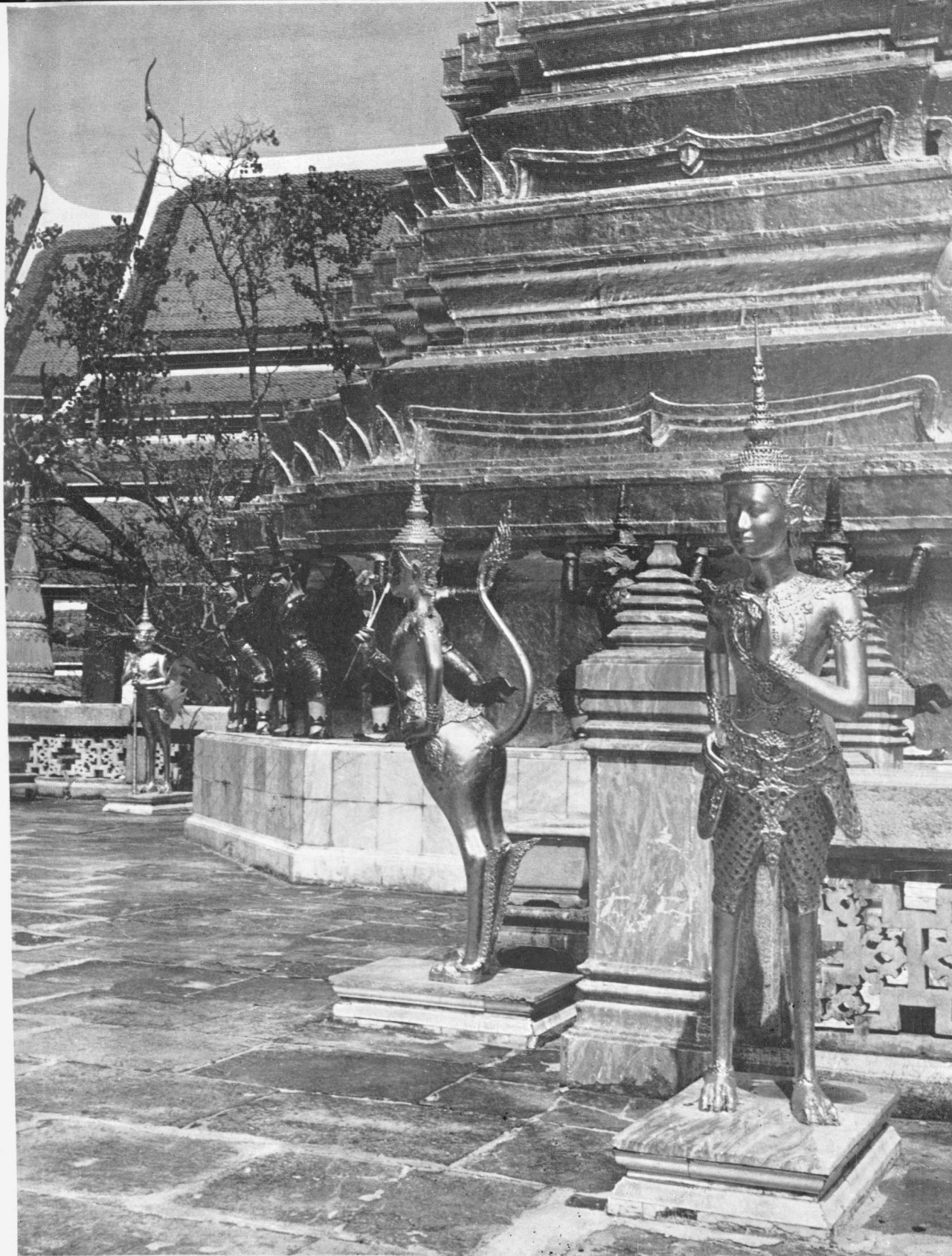


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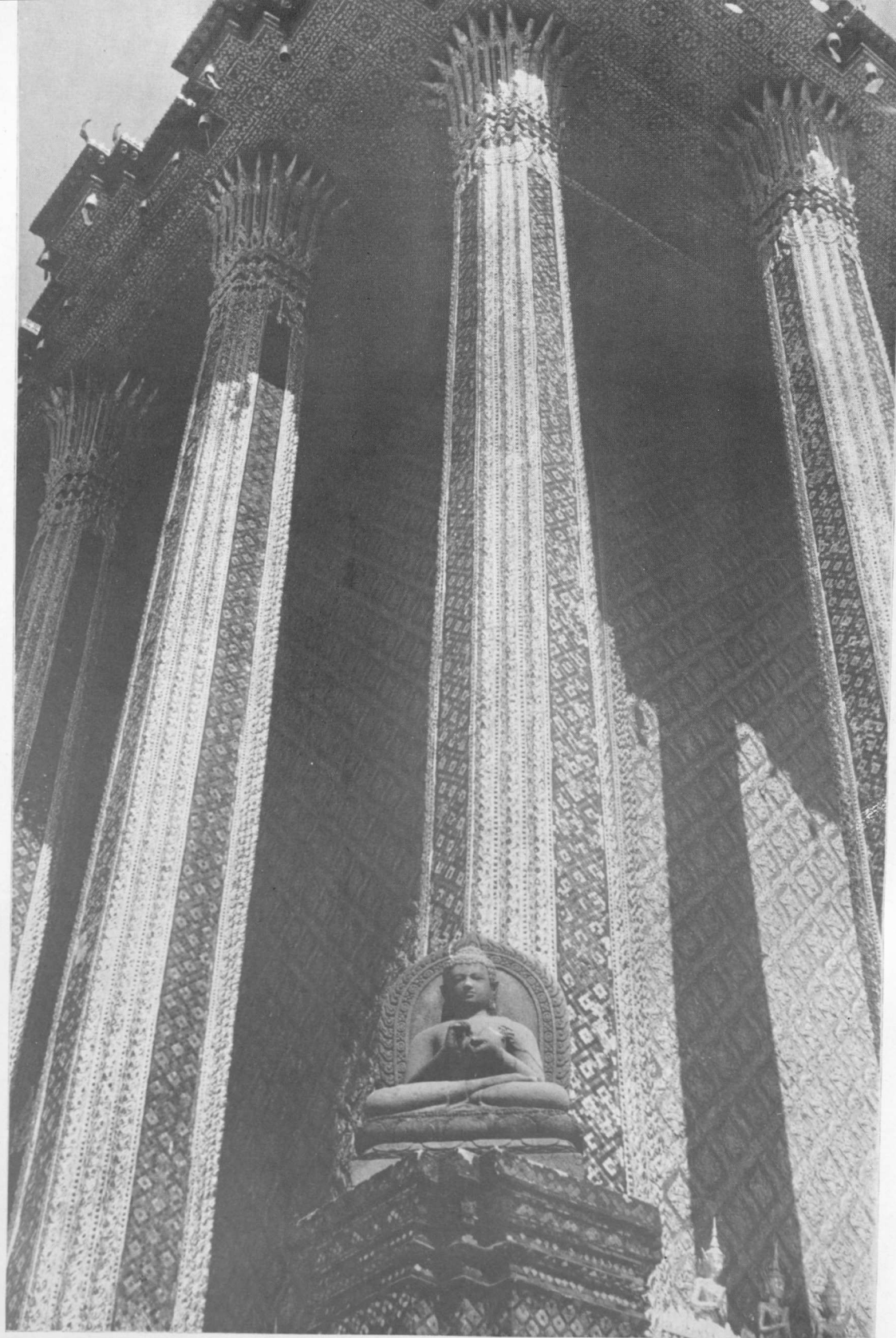


*The Golden Cetiya and Mandhapa*



*Kinnaree and Kinnara*





*A stone figure of the Javanese Style*

## WAT ARUN

*or*

### *The Temple Of The Dawn*

IN THONBURI ON THE WEST bank of the Menam Chao Phya opposite Wat Po there is a prang which is a landmark. It measures about seven hundred and sixty feet round the base and is over two hundred and sixty feet high. It is decorated with pieces of broken porcelain set into it in the shape of flowers. The nature of the ornamentation is obvious only at close quarters.

The prang dominates Wat Chaeng, which is also known as Wat Arun, or The Temple of the Dawn. It might equally well be associated with the sunset for it presents a most impressive silhouette against the sky of early evening. The prang has four smaller prang at the corners and between these there are four Mandhapa.

Each of the small prang has four niches with a statue of Phra Pai, the wind-god, on his white horse in each niche.

The four Mandhapa contain the four most important episodes from the life of the Buddha. There is the birth, sheltering under the naga, preaching to the five ascetics and the death with his disciples around him. Angels, giants and monkeys support the Mandhapa and the five prang.

The Phra Buddha Prang, as the great central one is called, has three galleries running round it and they can be reached by climbing up any one of the four very steep staircases. Above each staircase there is a niche with a figure of Indra on a three-headed elephant. There is no need to climb higher than the first gallery to see kinnara or kinnaree set in niches all the way round in relief and the giants supporting the rest of the prang on their upturned palms.

Between the prang and the river there are two small Vihara. The northern one contains a small statue of King Taksin in a glass case which rests on his very large bed.

Behind the Phra Buddha Prang there is a Vihara the exterior walls of which are decorated with Chinese tiles, not in the best of repair. The windows and doors are lacquered in black and gold. It contains a seated image of the Buddha flanked by two seated images in front of the large one.

The north-east part of the grounds contains a modern building which is a school for samanera. Near it is a small chapel ornamented with broken china and heavily guarded by two giant figures of fierce mien, who stand on either side of the door.

On the north and south sides of this chapel there is a pavilion containing a seated stone figure. These commemorate two religious zealots. The one on the south side is for Nai Nok. He told his relatives that he had decided to burn himself to prove his devotion to his religion. He went to Wat

Arun to meditate, eating only occasionally. Eventually he set fire to himself as he sat under the Bodhi tree, presumably the one nearby. This occurred in 1817 A.D. More than twenty years before, in 1790 A.D., Nai Ruang also burned himself at Wat Arun and the figure in the north pavilion is for him. He went with two friends to Wat Krut and, holding lotus plants in their hands, they wished that they might be allowed to go to heaven. It was to be taken as a sign that, if any of the plants bloomed, the owner or owners would have the wish granted. The following day Nai Ruang's plant had a lotus flower. He went to Wat Arun where he meditated for a time before covering himself with oil and burning himself.

The Bot is in the north-west corner and is surrounded by a square gallery containing seated gilded images. This gallery is interrupted by four ornamental gateways flanked by bronze elephants. The courtyard contains many Chinese stone ornaments, and in each corner there is a rather unusual type of cetiya with Chinese figures in niches.

The exterior walls of the Bot are white with inlaid porcelain flowers, giving the effect of wallpaper. The doors and windows are in black and gold lacquer. On the east wall there is a memorial, a Buddha image wearing the Royal vestments. This is in memory of King Rama II and was placed there by King Rama IV.



Inside the Bot there is a gilded image of the Buddha seated and flanked by two disciples. This was presented to the wat by King Rama II. The mural paintings, depicting the life story of the Buddha, are in excellent condition.

Between the Bot and the Vihara there is a Mandhapa covering a footprint of the Buddha.

Wat Chaeng was the original name of this wat and it was already consecrated ground when Thonburi became the capital in 1767 A.D. King Taksin built his palace so near that the wat was included in the royal precincts. It became the Chapel Royal after he had rebuilt it, and bhikkhu no longer lived in it.

In 1780 A.D. King Taksin had the Emerald Buddha brought from Vientiane in Laos and placed in the Bot at Wat Arun.

When King Rama I founded the new capital on the eastern bank of the river at Bangkok in 1782 A.D., the Emerald Buddha was removed from Wat Arun which ceased to be the Chapel Royal and once more accommodated bhikkhu.

King Rama II (1809-1824 A.D.) undertook a reconstruction of the wat which was not finished at the time of his death. He built a new Bot and Vihara and began the work of raising the height of the Phra Buddha Prang from fifty feet, as it then was, to its present two hundred and sixty feet. The

work was completed in the reign of the King Rama III (1824-1851 A.D.).

During King Chulalongkorn's reign (1868-1910 A.D.) the Bot was burnt and in 1909 A.D. the King ordered the building of a new Bot and repairs to the Phra Buddha Prang.

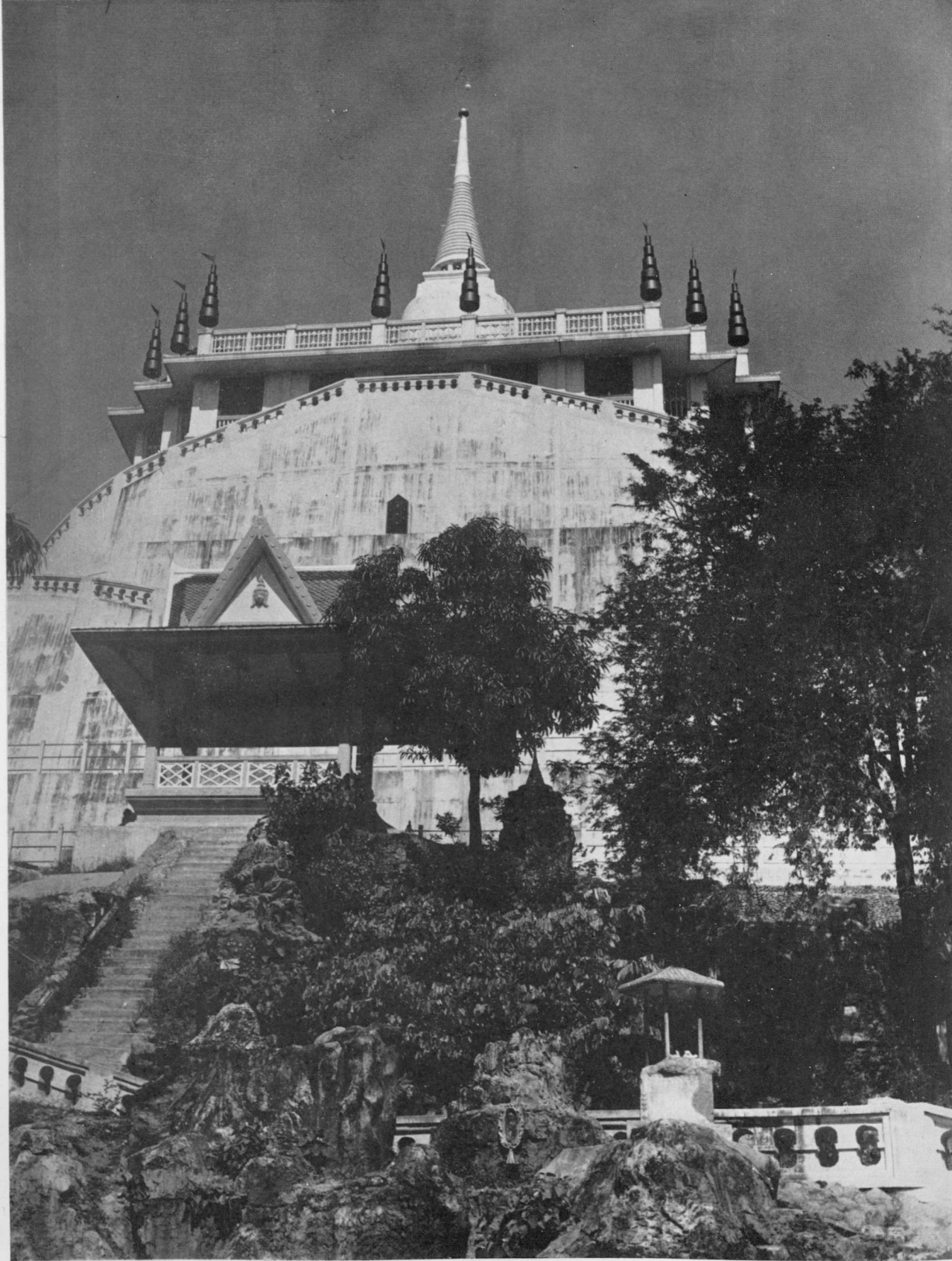


*Wat Arun, an impressive silhouette against the sky of early evening*



*Inside the Bot*





*The Golden Mount*

## *WAT SAKET AND THE GOLDEN MOUNT*

**T**HE CITY OF BANGKOK LIES on a flat plain and has no natural eminences. On the east side of the old city wall, and, therefore, outside the confines of the original city, is an artificial construction known as The Golden Mount. It forms part of Wat Saket.

Before the founding of Bangkok there was a small wat on this site known as Wat Sakë. In 1782 A.D. General Chao Phya Chakri returned from a successful campaign in Cambodia. On hearing that Phra Chao Tak Sin, who was then king with his capital in Thonburi, had religious delusions, he decided to proclaim himself king. Before proceeding to Thonburi for this purpose, General Chakri is said to have gone to Wat Sakë for the lustration rites. After his accession, the new king decided to build his capital on the left bank of the river. He restored the Bot of Wat Sakë which was then given the name of Wat Saket to commemorate the king's lustration, 'sra' meaning 'cleaning of the hair' and 'kesa' 'hair'.

The authorities are in agreement that Wat Saket was one of the most important wats in the country. In 1818 A.D. it received a cutting from the Bodhi tree of Anuradhapura on the return of a Siamese religious mission from Ceylon. This tree still exists in front of the Bot. In 1823 A.D. in the reign of King Rama II the abbot of Wat Saket was made Sangharaja

and resided at Wat Mahadhatu until his death in 1842 A.D. King Rama III (1824-1851 A.D.) had the wat rebuilt. Certain princes and high officials were cremated in this wat.

The gallery surrounding the Bot and the four pairs of cetiya outside the gallery date from the third reign. It was then that the sima were covered by structures decorated with glass mosaic.

The Vihara is situated outside the enclosure of the Bot and is divided into two parts. The southern chamber contains a Buddha image which came from Pitsanuloke. In 1899 A.D. when King Chulalongkorn began the construction of Dusit Palace and Wat Dusit had to be demolished, a bronze statue of the Buddha was brought from there and placed in the northern chamber of the Vihara of Wat Saket. This would indicate that the wat was still considered of importance in the fifth reign. Today, however, it is in a most regrettable state of disrepair and neglect. Nowadays it appears to be considered more meritorious to build a new wat than to repair an old one, with the result that a historic foundation like Wat Saket is allowed to decay.

To the west of the Bot is the Golden Mount. This was originally built by the command of King Rama III. He desired to have on this site a construction similar to the Golden Mount at Ayudhya. It was built of bricks and collapsed during the construction of the second story. King Mongkut who succeeded

King Rama III in 1851 A.D., had the bricks and rubble built as an artificial mount.

The idea of temple mountains can be traced through Indian Hinduism and from there to ancient Mesopotamia. Funan and Java had their sacred mountains and in the Khmer empire the idea gave rise to the great temples, the ruins of which we can still see in Cambodia.

In 1897 A.D. relics of the Lord Buddha were discovered at Piprawa near the Nepalese frontier. The British Government gave them to King Chulalongkorn who distributed them to many Buddhist countries. In 1899 A.D. Thailand's share of the relics was placed in a small cetiya on the top of the Golden Mount.

Each year in November the wat Saket fair takes place. The two ladders leading up the side of the Mount are decorated with coloured lights and from the streets nearby can be seen lines of pilgrims climbing to the top.



## WAT SUTHAT

or

### *The Wat Of The Great Swing*

**W**AT SUTHAT IS SOMETIMES CALLED The Wat of the Great Swing. There is in the street to the north of the wat an erection consisting of two enormous teak posts with a carved crossbar at the top, which was formerly used for an annual swinging ceremony of Brahmin origin. Although the ceremony has been abolished, there is still a Brahmin temple nearby and Wat Suthat itself seems to have had close associations with Brahminism.

We need concern ourselves only with the Bot and Vihara which, apart from the cells of the bhikkhu and a few other buildings, comprise this wat. It is a most impressive sight. The two great structures stand on raised concrete platforms, the Vihara to the north of the Bot and surrounded by a gallery of Buddha images. The Bot is said to be the highest in Bangkok and has a pillared porch at its east and west ends. The Vihara faces north and at each corner of its platform there is a pavilion, the four portraying a day in the Lord Buddha's life. In the north-east pavilion he is asleep, in the north-west he is getting up, in the south-west he is dressing with, oddly enough, a monkey supporting the table on which he is standing, and in the south-east pavilion he is meditating.

In Wat Mahadhatu in Sukhodaya in the Phra Ruang period of Thai history when Sukhodaya was the capital, there was a very fine and very large Buddha image. It was twenty-six feet high with a span from knee to knee of about twenty feet. When King Rama I (1782-1809 A.D.) saw this remarkable image, he decided to have it conveyed to Bangkok and it was accordingly brought down the river. The name of this image is Phra Sri Sakya Muni, another name for the Lord Buddha, and it was cast in the fourteenth century A.D. It depicts the purity of line and serenity of expression of the Sukhodaya images.

King Rama I began the construction of a Vihara to cover this image and the work was continued by King Rama II who personally did some of the very fine carving on the doors. Each door consists of two pieces of wood, about eighteen feet high, five feet wide and just over six inches thick. The carving goes to a depth of about five and a half inches. Various animals, such as tigers, monkeys, deer, squirrels, elephants, snakes, frogs and pigs are depicted. The work was completed in the reign of King Rama II, and it is said that, on its completion, the king had the instruments thrown into the river because he did not wish anyone to copy the carving. Unfortunately on Friday, November 13, 1959 A.D., half of the north door was destroyed by fire.

Phra Sri Sakya Muni is under a nine-tiered umbrella and surrounded by paintings on the walls of the Vihara, the

roof of which is supported by pillars painted on all sides to the ceiling. The paintings in this wat with their flat tints and primitive perspective, are interesting as they are amongst the few left in Bangkok showing the indigenous Thai style unaffected by Western influence. Lives of Bodhisatvas are depicted but, as there are eight pillars in addition to the four large walls, it is really out of the question to attempt to describe the paintings in any sort of detail.

The five ascetics who accompanied the Lord Buddha before his enlightenment and joined him again after are represented in the Vihara.

The Bot of Wat Suthat was built in 1844 A.D. in the reign of King Rama III (1824-1851 A.D.). It contains an image of the Buddha which was cast in the Grand Palace and presented to the wat by the king. It is known as Phra Buddha Tri Lokacheta or the Buddha of the Brotherhood of the Three Worlds, and it contains relics. It measures about thirteen feet from knee to knee. In front of it on a raised platform there is a life-size Buddha image designed by King Mongkut. It is surrounded by eighty kneeling disciples depicted in natural colours with yellow, brown, black and pink skins, a silent and solemn assembly.

There are small images representing the Buddha on various occasions; for seven days he stood looking at the Bodhi tree, motionless, without even blinking; for seven days he walked;

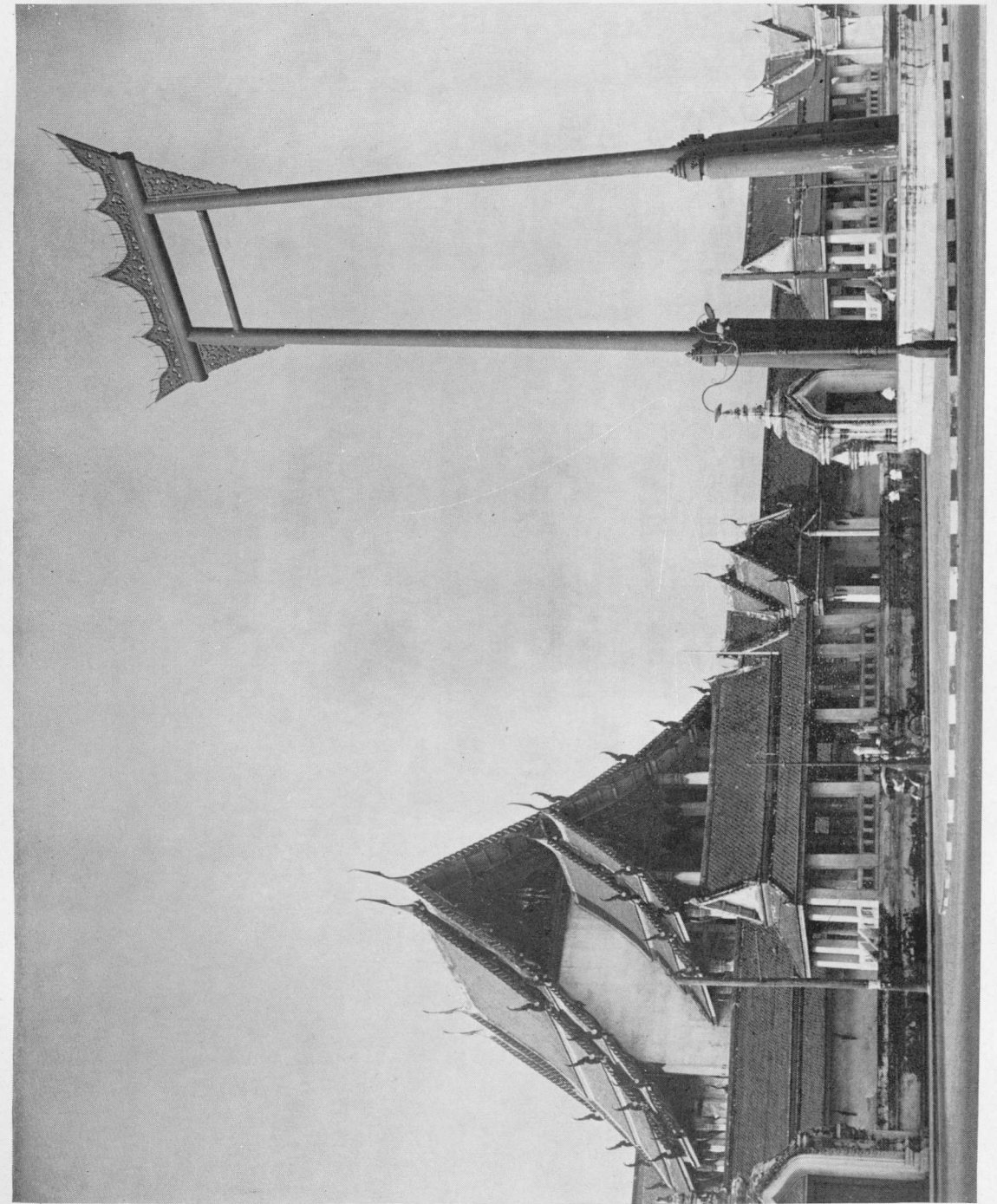
for seven days he sat looking at the Bodhi tree; for seven days he sat under the muccalinda tree; a heavy storm came and the king of the nagas covered him with its many heads; he is holding rice mixed with milk in his hand; he is sitting in the Ratanaghara in Buddhagaya meditating.

Like the Vihara, the Bot is painted with murals from floor to ceiling, all in good condition.





*Mural*



*Wat Suthat and the Great Swing*



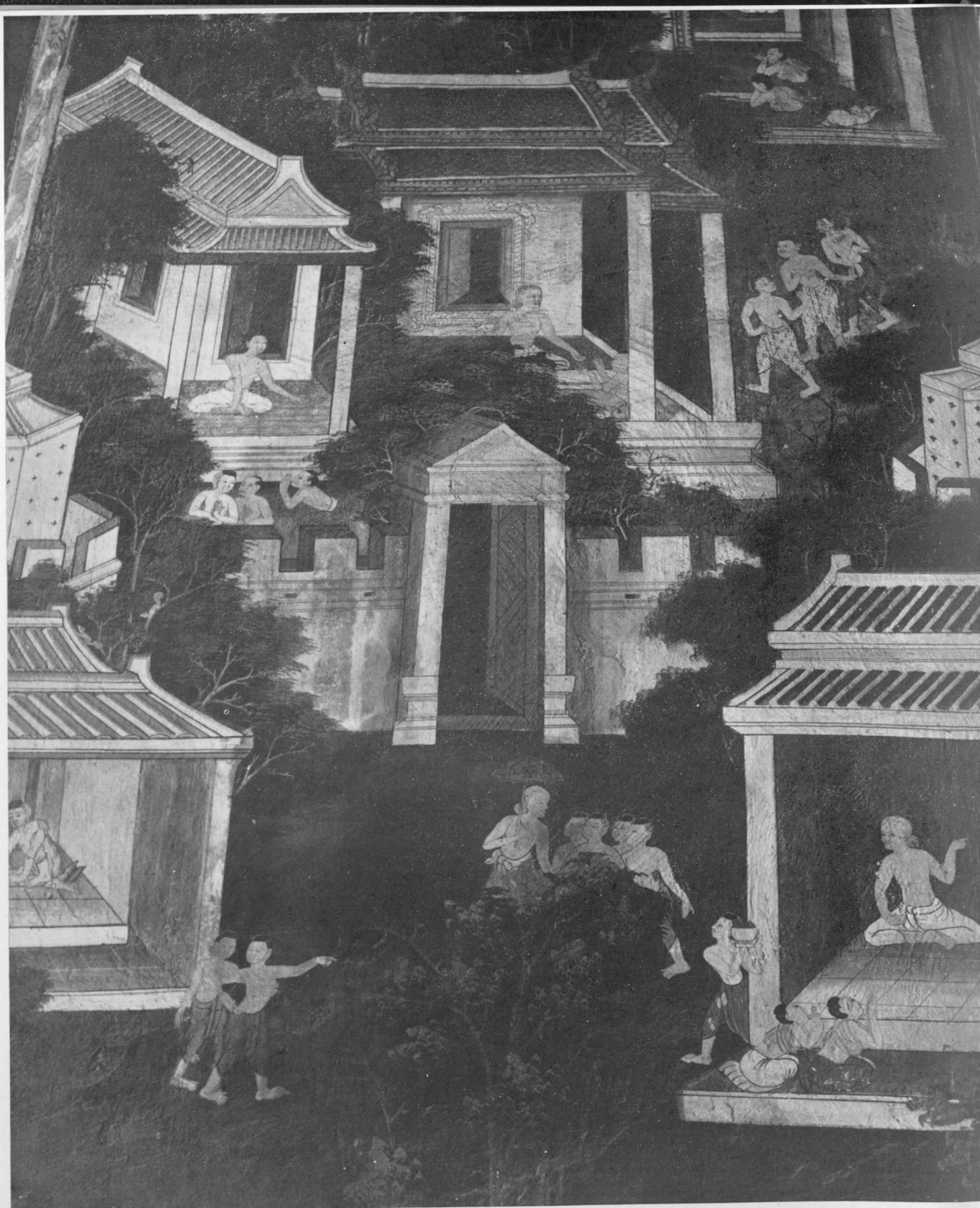


*Mural*



*The Great Swing from Wat Suthat*





*Mural*

## WAT MAHADHATU

*or*

### *The Wat Of The Great Relic*

ONE CANNOT FAIL TO BE affected by the atmosphere of Wat Mahadhatu (pronounced Ma-ha-tat). It is used for meditation which people practise in and around the buildings. The courtyard in the north-east part of the grounds is used for this purpose and people may be seen sitting on mats there or trying to walk in the prescribed way. Cells have been built inside the Vihara to accommodate those practising meditation. The gallery surrounding the main group of building contains many images of the Buddha but they can be seen only on the west side as cells for meditation have been built in front of them on the other three sides. Classes of instruction in meditation are open to the public. This concentration of thought seems to produce its own atmosphere.

Wat Mahadhatu lies between the Grand Palace and the National Museum with Pramane Ground on its east side. Before 1782 A.D. when Bangkok became the capital, it was known as Wat Salak and is thought to have been of some importance for a long time prior to that date. When Rama I became king in 1782 A.D. he gave to his brother the honorary title of



Wangna Prince.<sup>1</sup> It was the Wangna Prince who built what is now the National Museum as a palace for himself. In 1783 A.D. the Wangna Prince decided to have Wat Salak rebuilt. The plan was roughly the same as at present with the Mandhapa the most easterly building, the Bot and Vihara parallel to each other behind it and the cells of the bhikkhu south-west of the Bot on what is believed to have been the site of Wat Salak. On completion of the work the wat was renamed Wat Nibbanarama, the Wat of Nirvana.

The belfry and the library were behind the Bot but were removed during the reign of King Rama III. The belfry was rebuilt to the north of its original position and the library was housed within the cells at the corner of the Sangharaja's residence which can still be seen to the southwest of the Bot. To

<sup>1</sup> During the Ayudhya period (1350-1767 A.D.) the king, as supreme commander of the armed forces, was accustomed to name a near relative as his second in command. This chosen prince was recognised as next in succession to the throne, but because of certain peculiarities in the Siamese rules of succession, it would not be accurate to translate his title as Heir Apparent. As second in command of the armed forces he was, for all routine purposes, their active commander. His palace was, therefore, known as the Wangna or "Palace to the Front" and, as in Java, the prince who occupied it was often called "Palace to the Front." The Wangna of the fourth reign, a brother of King Mongkut, held the title of Wangna King or "Second King" and for this reason it has sometimes been supposed that all the Wangna Princes were "Second Kings", but in fact it was not so.

give space for new University buildings within the wat, a new belfry was recently built about sixty feet to the east of the old one.

There were seven gates in the wall surrounding that wat. Facing the Mandhapa was a gate with a roof in the shape of a prang which was for the king's use. This prang no longer exists. Prior to 1878 A.D. royal cremations had taken place at Wat Bovonives, but after that date at Wat Mahadhatu. When the heir to the throne died in 1894 A.D., King Chulalongkorn decided to construct a permanent building for the urn during the ceremonies preliminary to the cremation. Pramane Ground was the site of royal cremations and so the King chose the eastern boundary of Wat Mahadhara for the new building. The eastern part of the wall was demolished and one of the seven gates disappeared. The King laid the first stone in 1896 A.D. but the building was still not finished at the time of his death in 1910 A.D.. It became the National Library in the reign of King Rama VI (1910-1925 A.D.).

In 1767 A.D. the Burmese captured Ayudhya which was then the capital of the kingdom. During the battle many of the sacred manuscripts were either spoilt or actually destroyed. In 1788 A.D. the Ninth Council was convened and held in this wat. It was so named because the Thai people considered it to be the ninth such assembly since the death of the Lord Buddha. Its purpose was the revision of the sacred texts. At this time the wat was given the name Wat Srisanphejna.

The abbot became the Sangharaja in 1784 A.D. and was so for twenty-three years during which time the wat held the principal place as a royal wat. The Wangna Prince was ordained in 1785 A.D. in the Bot and remained in the Order for one week. When he died in 1803 A.D., the king renamed the wat and it was known as Wat Sri Ratanamahadhatu or The Wat of the Great Relic. There is a wat of this name in provinces which formerly contained capitals or the seats of royal princes

During a celebration in 1802 A.D. the Mandhapa, Bot and Vihara were destroyed by fire from fireworks, and they were rebuilt in their present form by the Wangna Prince. Only the gallery surrounding the main group of buildings and the cells of the bhikkhu were saved.

A Thai religious mission returned from Ceylon in 1818 A.D. bringing cuttings from the Bodhi tree of Anuradhapura. This tree is an offshoot of the Mahabohi tree of Buddhagaya. The cuttings which came to Thailand are now large trees. One of them can be seen in the north-east corner of this wat.

Prince Mongkut, the heir apparent to the throne, was ordained in Wat Phra Keoh as a novice in 1817 A.D. when he was fourteen and lived in Wat Mahadhatu for seven months. Later when he became king, he had a small Vihara built near the Bodhi tree to commemorate the spot where he had lived

during his novitiate. This building is known as Vihara Bodhilanka and can be seen, with the Bodhi tree behind it, from the road running past the National Library.

In each of the two courtyards on the north and south side of the Mandhapa there are two prang and two cetiya. The Sangharaja died in 1817 A.D. and his ashes and those of his predecessor were placed in the two prang. The cetiya are memorials to private individuals.

Prince Mongkut was ordained in 1824 A.D. and remained a bhikkhu until he became king twenty-seven years later. He became a doctor of theology during his stay in this wat. In 1829 A.D. he went to Wat Samorai as he had a disagreement about certain customs and conditions then prevailing at Wat Mahadhatu and in 1836 A.D. he became abbot of Wat Bovonives.

Reconstruction was begun on the wat in 1844 A.D. and finished in 1851 A.D. by King Mongkut. It was at this time that he had Vihara Bodhilanka built.

Wat Mahadhatu ceased to be the patriarch's residence in 1851 A.D. as the abbot of Wat Po became the Sangharaja in that year.

There had been a religious school within the Palace precincts since Bangkok became the capital. It was moved by the king to Wat Mahadhatu in 1889 A.D. It was called Mahadhatu Vidyalaya (pronounced Wit-ee-a-lie) and became a centre of instruction in Pali. King Chulalongkorn decided that

this was not a sufficiently wide study for the bhikkhu and in 1896 A.D. he established Mahachulalongkorn which became the highest institution of learning for bhikkhu in Thailand. There is a pleasant university courtyard within the wat with asoke tree growing round it and new buildings have just been constructed. The education of a bhikkhu from the provinces may not be up to university standard in which case he goes to the pre-university at Wat Mahadhatu.

In this wat the most important building is that containing the Mandhapa which covers the holy relic. The building itself is not in any way distinguished and merely forms a shelter for the Mandhapa. Inside large pillars support the roof and between them can be seen the Mandhapa which was built after the style of a Mandhapa in the Chapel Royal at Ayudhya. It is over sixty feet high and consists of four pillars standing on a base of marble slabs. The pillars, inlaid with blue glass mosaic, support the decorated pyramid-shaped roof. Under the Mandhapa is a gilded cetiya for the relic.

The Vihara contains many cells for those in meditation. The image of the Buddha, like that in the Bot, is in the Bangkok style of King Rama I period.

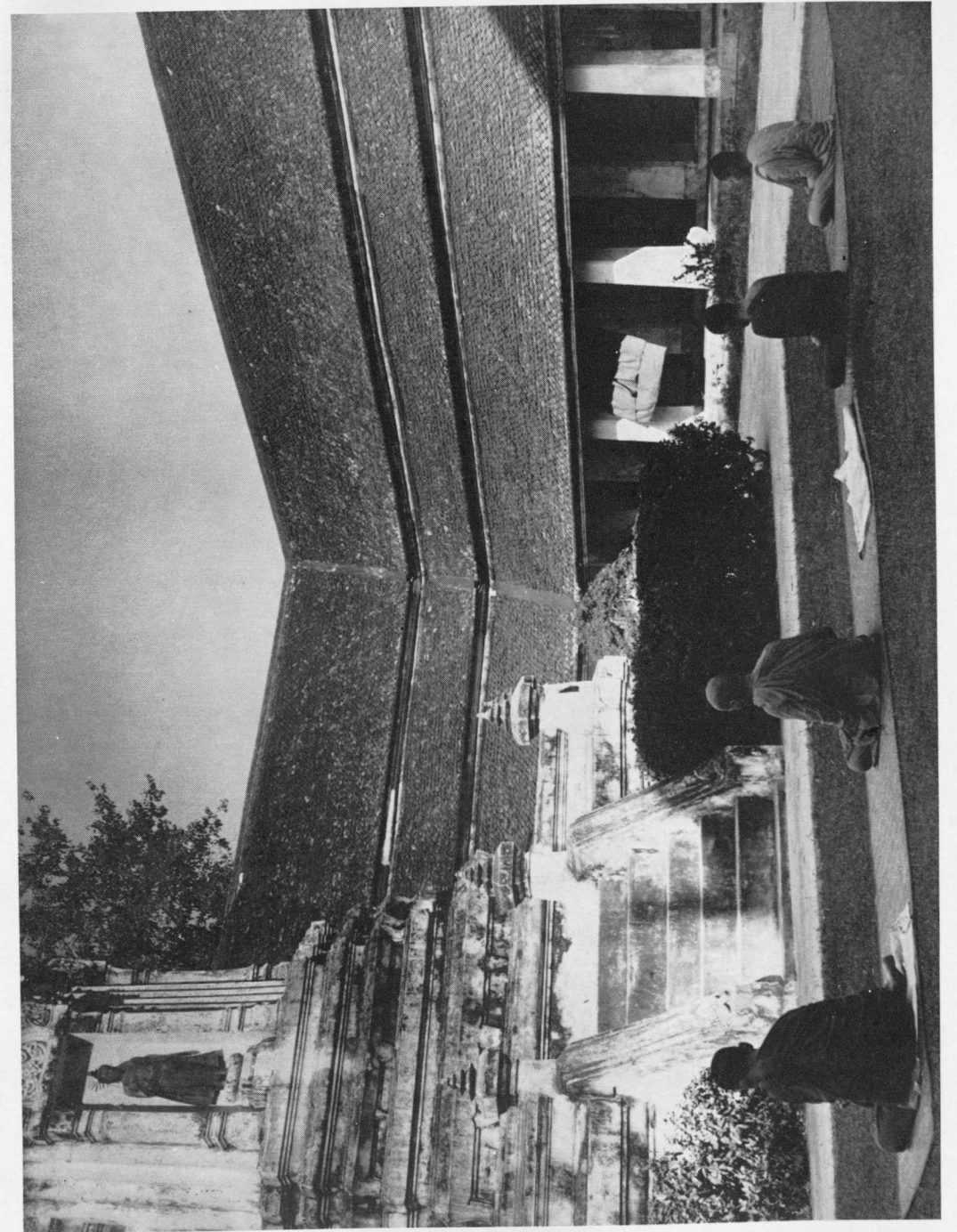
The Bot is said to be the largest in Bangkok. Inside it is characterised by its austerity. Apart from the fact that its plain wooden ceiling is painted red, it is as austere in line as any Scottish Presbyterian kirk. The present walls contain the

sima marking the sacred area, the pillars inside forming the line of the original walls. The image is surrounded by the eight most famous disciples of the Buddha. There are also statues to the memory of Sangharaja Kai Tuen, so named because he had the power to calm wild fowl, and to the eighth and fourteenth abbots of the wat. The lights in the Bot are suspended on the pillars from the beaks of symbolic swans.





*Trying to walk in the prescribed way*



*Bhikku sitting on mats*





*Vihara Bodhilanka*

## WAT PHRA JETUBON

*or*

*The Wat Of The Reclining Buddha*

**W**AT PHRA JETUBON IS MORE commonly called Wat Po. Its original name was Wat Bodharam. It lies next to the Grand Palace on the south side and is divided into two parts by Jetubon Road. On the north side lies the most important group of buildings, namely the Bot, several Vihara, the old library, many cetiya, various pavilions and a school, and on the south side are the abbot's residence, the cells of the bhikkhu and the pavilion which is now used as the library.

Many people visit Wat Po in the course of a year, but it is doubtful how much of its significance is conveyed by walking through the grounds. It is known to many western people as the Wat of the Reclining Buddha, but there is a great deal more to be said about this wat than that it is the home of this very large image.

An inscription dated 1789 A.D. can be seen in the inner chapel of the east Vihara. According to this the wat was restored by King Rama I. The work was begun in 1789 A.D. and completed in 1801 A.D. The dedication of the restored wat was the scene of great rejoicing and the king and his courtiers personally served food to the bhikkhu. The wat was at this time renamed Wat Phra Jetubon. The fact that it is

still known as Wat Po would seem to indicate that the people have never entirely dropped the old name of Wat Bodharam.

King Rama III (1824-1851 A.D.) visited the wat in 1831 A.D. for the kathina ceremony. He found many of the buildings in ruins and gave orders for their restoration. After the sack of Ayudhya in 1767 A.D. by the Burmese something remained of the famous standing Buddha in the main chapel of Wat Phra Sri Sarbej. King Rama I (1782-1809 A.D.) had this statue brought to Bangkok. It had probably suffered irreparable damage because a cetiya over one hundred and twenty feet high was built over it on the west side of the enclosure of the Bot. This cetiya was repaired and decorated with green tiles by King Rama III during the second restoration of the wat. On one side of it he had a white cetiya (which now looks dark cream rather than white) built and dedicated to the memory of his father, King Rama II, and on the other side a yellow one dedicated to himself. The blue one which stands behind those three was built later for himself by King Mongkut (1851-1868 A.D.). It was also during King Rama III's reconstruction of the wat that the Reclining Buddha was made, and mural paintings with inscriptions in explanation of them were added to the wat. Unfortunately many of these have disappeared. There were paintings, for example, on the Vihara of the Reclining Buddha but they have now almost completely disappeared on the north and south walls although the explanatory tablet can still be read.

Enclosed courtyards divide the enclosure of the Bot from the outer courtyards of the wat. A cloister runs all the way round the enclosure with seated images of the Buddha, mostly gilded, placed along the walls facing out to the Bot. The cloisters are interrupted by a Vihara set at each of the cardinal points.

Each Vihara is divided into two parts, the outer opening on to the outer courtyards and the inner opening on to the enclosure of the Bot. The outer chapel of the east Vihara contains an image of the Buddha sitting under a Bodhi tree. There is an inscription stating that this was brought from Wat Khao In in Svargalok by King Rama I and also describing a mural painting depicting Prince Siddartha's quest for truth, his temptation, vanquishment of Mara (the Evil One) and enlightenment under the Bodhi tree. This painting has completely disappeared. The inner chapel contains a standing image of the Buddha about thirty feet high. It came from Ayudhya. Mural paintings, no longer visible, represented the ten stages of decay of the dead body, which is a subject for meditation, and the ten Knowledges, with explanatory inscriptions.

The outer chapel of the south Vihara contains the image known as Phra Jinaraj which was brought from Sukhodaya at the instigation of King Rama I and contains part of the holy relics discovered at Nan in his reign. The inner chapel and its



mural paintings date from King Rama III's reign. The paintings depicted the Stanzas of Victory, being eight pali verses which are always chanted in a morning service of benediction. They are concerned with the Buddha's victory over evil. The paintings have disappeared.

King Rama I placed in the outer chapel of the western Vihara the image known as Phra Jinasih which was brought from Sukhodaya along with Phra Jinaraj, and also contains holy relics brought from the Grand Palace. The mural paintings in this chapel represented the story of the hair relics of the Buddha. The inner chapel in this Vihara was also built by order of King Rama III. The mural paintings depicted the location of the Buddha's footprints.

In the north Vihara the outer chapel contains a group consisting of the Buddha seated on a rock with an elephant and a monkey presenting gifts to him. On the doors are paintings of foreign figures. The mural paintings in the inner chapel, built by King Rama III, represented the thirteen modes of asceticism, but only the explanatory inscriptions remain.

The Bot contains a part of the ashes of King Rama I. The lives of the Buddha's most eminent disciples, forty-one in number, are depicted and explained on the walls of the interior. The outsides of the doors depict scenes from the Ramakian, the Thai version of the Indian Ramayana story, in inlaid mother of pearl. Scenes from the same legend are to be found in bas-

relief on the stone panels surrounding the Bot with explanatory inscriptions in the form of poems by poets contemporary with the second restoration of the wat. In the courtyard surrounding the Bot there are many quaint and charming stone figures apparently of Chinese origin.

The cloisters which connect the four Vihara contain many inscriptions ranging from literary commentaries and prosody to the names of the various provinces with the names of their governors.

I have referred several times to inscriptions to be seen in this wat. They are one of its most outstanding features. Many are to be seen in the enclosure of the four great cetiya. There are explanations of paintings, medical charts and treatises, details of the army, poems on the subject of morality. In the outer courtyard of the wat there are stone groups of Rishi or hermits. These were formerly placed in pavilions which originally numbered sixteen and are now ten, and the inscriptions on the wall behind the place where each Rishi stood can still be read. One Rishi knew how to cure fainting fits, another knew how to massage and so on. The Rishi were moved to the outer courtyard about the time of King Chulalongkorn. Each pavilion also contained two stone figures representing various nationalities, with explanatory inscriptions. Of these figures only four remain. Two, a Chinese and an aborigine from the south of Thailand or Malaya, can be seen in the pavilion which has

recently been reconstructed for the sale of refreshments, and the other two, from the Shan States and Europe, in the pavilion which lies to the east of it in the same courtyard.

Two pavilions lie to the east of the great cetiya. In one there are inscriptions giving advice on child health. Above the doors of the other can still be seen anatomical charts.

The enclosure of the library is behind that of the four great cetiya. This building is encrusted with broken porcelain similar to the decoration on the prang at Wat Arun. It is surrounded by pavilions containing more inscriptions. The story of the Nine Buddhist Councils with inscriptions was painted in the library but is no longer visible. (These Councils have been explained under Wat Mahadhatu.) On the outer walls of these pavilions can be seen inscribed poems of a moralistic nature by Prince Deja Disorn who was the brother of King Rama III.

It is believed that King Rama III intended Wat Po to become a seat of learning. This would explain the variety of the subjects treated in the inscriptions. Stone and marble from various parts of the country were used in the construction of the buildings, sculpture in metal and plaster, and fine inlay can be seen. It was said that every plant of medicinal value grew in the enclosure of the wat and many are still to be found there.

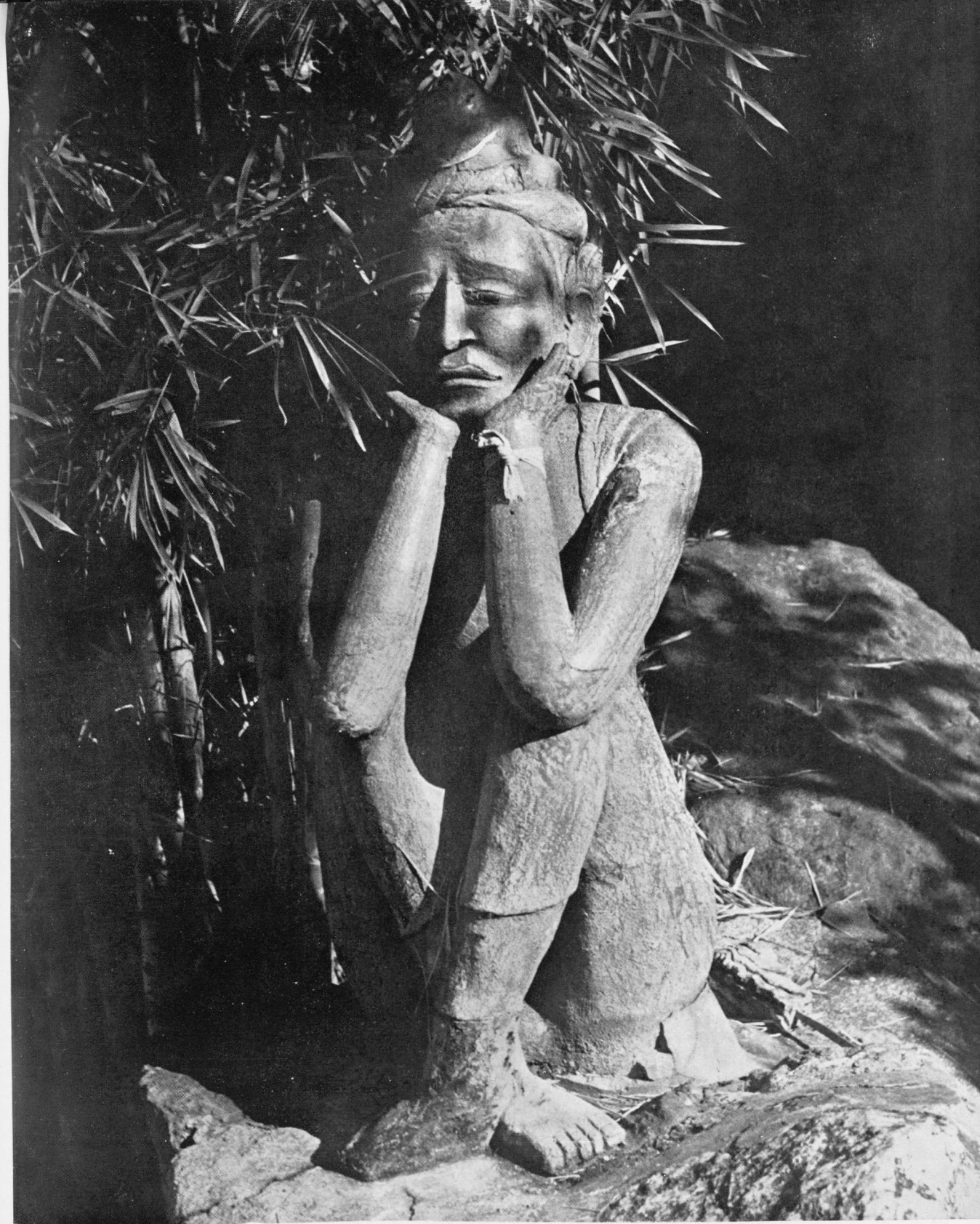
King Rama III had the Vihara of the Reclining Buddha built in the north-west corner of the grounds as a shelter for

the image which is made of brick and plaster and gilded. It is about one hundred and fifty feet long and the soles of its feet, inlaid with mother of pearl, show signs peculiar to the Buddha. As I have already said certain of the paintings are no longer discernible but they depicted scenes from Singhalese history and the lives of the thirteen eminent women disciples.



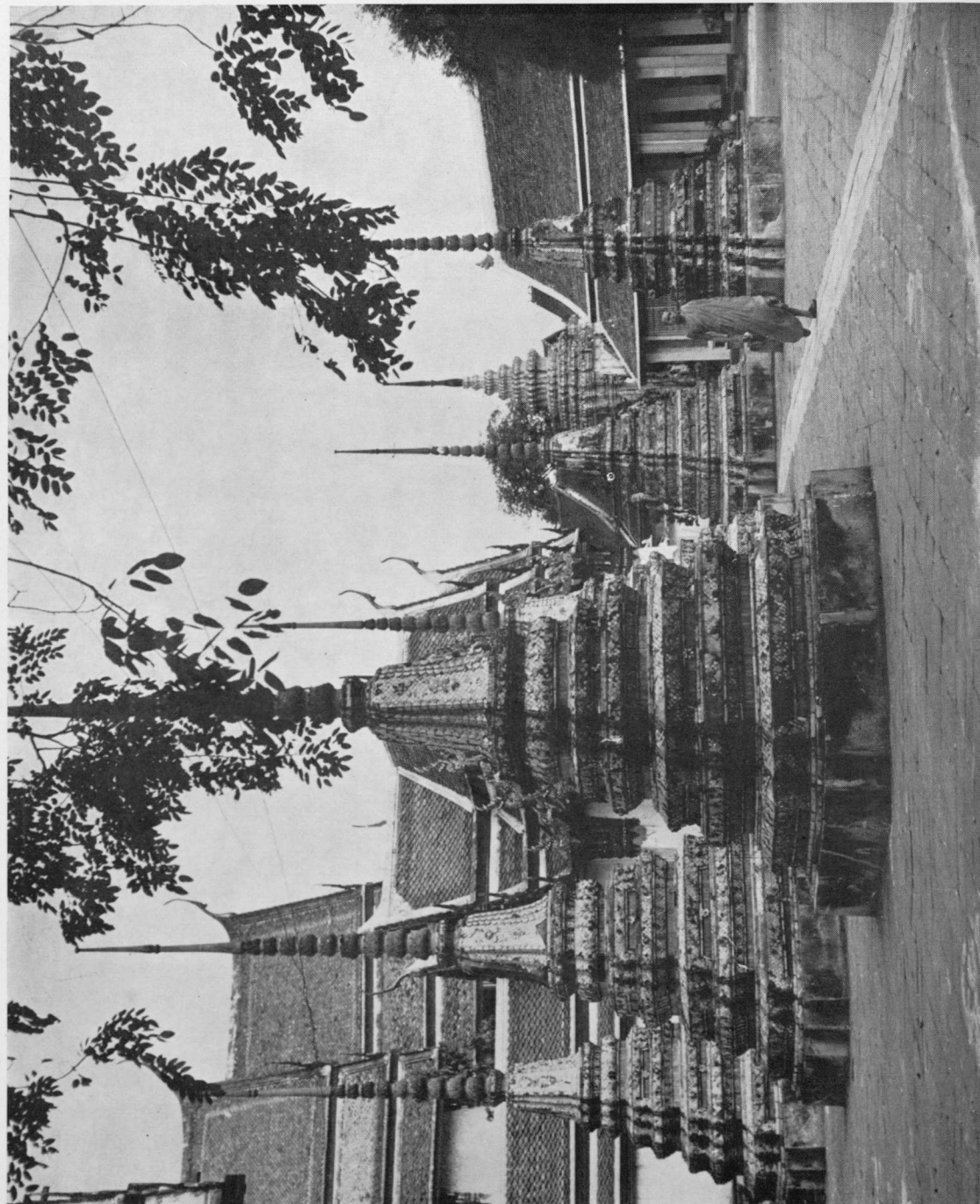


*Bell Tower and Four Great Cetiya, Wat Po*



*Rishi*





*Cetiya in the courtyards*



*Mother of Pearl Doors*

Bayerische  
Staatsbibliothek  
München





Corner of a courtyard



The Cloisters contain many inscriptions





*Seated Images*



*Lady with Mandolin*





*Chinese stone lion*



*Stone figure of Chinese Mandarin*

## WAT BOVONIVES

**T**HE FULL NAME OF THIS wat is Bovonives Vihara which means "the most excellent resting-place." It is commonly known as Wat Bovonives (pronounced Bo-won-i-wade) or by the shorter form Bovon. It is an important wat because its history is closely connected with that of King Mongkut, one of the most important kings in Thai history. It has also great significance in the history of Thai Buddhism as a new sect was formed there.

In 1824 A.D. King Rama III became king and conferred the title of Wangna Prince on his uncle. In 1827 A.D. the Wangna Prince founded Wat Bovonives. Ten years later Prince Mongkut, brother of the king, became the abbot of this wat. He had left Wat Mahadhatu because he found himself in disagreement with certain practices there and lived for many years at Wat Raja. At Wat Bovonives he formed the dhammayuttika sect, recognising only traditional practices and the cannon law. He was able to raise the standard of religious education and founded an important Pali school at this wat.

When Prince Mongkut arrived at Wat Bovonives in 1837 A.D. there were five bhikkhu there and it was still being built. His policy made it one of the most important religious centres

in Thailand. King Rama VI and King Rama VII were ordained in Wat Phra Keoh but lived in Wat Bovonives. His Majesty King Phumipol Aduldej was ordained and remained a bhikkhu for two weeks in Wat Bovonives in 1956 A.D.

This wat is unusual in that the Bot faces north. The main entrance is also from the north side, a highly ornamented gate. West of it on the wall is a pleasing small pavilion which was built at the beginning of King Mongkut's reign. When the King went to the wat for the kathina ceremony he was borne in procession on a palanquin in full ceremonial robes. It would have been too awkward to perform the ceremony wearing such elaborate vestments. Accordingly he changed into more suitable robes in the pavilion and at the end of the ceremony retired there once more to resume the elaborate dress for the procession back to the Palace.

On either side of the Bot there is a bell tower containing two images of the Buddha. The standing image on the east side is a very fine example of Dvaravati art. The sitting Buddha behind it is from Lopburi. The image facing north in the western structure is Srivijaya and behind is one from Lopburi.

Against the wall to the west of the Bot there is a small pavilion covering a footprint of the Buddha. Behind there are three images, one standing and flanked by two seated under the naga. The standing image is Sukhodaya and the other two Lopburi.



The doors and windows of the Bot are gilded and carved with the royal regalia, showing an elephant, a horse, a shoe, a sword and a crown. King Rama III had this work done and it is thought that, although his brother Prince Mongkut had been in the priesthood for so many years, he wanted him to succeed him as king and put the king's regalia at Wat Bovonives as a sign of this.

Inside the Bot there is a greatly venerated image, the Phra Jinasiha, four metres in height and made of bronze. It was brought from Pitsanuloke in 1829 A.D. by the Wangna Prince and is seated in the attitude known as "The Victory over Mara." (Mara is the Evil One.) There are two oil paintings of King Chulalongkorn, one depicting him in the robes worn for the kathina ceremony.

Facing the image, there is on the left a statue of the second abbot of the wat and on the right one of the third. The second abbot was Prince Pavaret (pronounced Pa-wa-ret) who joined Prince Mongkut at Wat Bovonives where he assisted him in his work of forming the dhammayuttika sect. When Prince Mongkut became king, Prince Pavaret became the second abbot of Wat Bovonives. In 1873 A.D. King Chulalongkorn appointed him Sangharaja. He died in 1892 A.D. and was succeeded as abbot by Prince Vajirayanavararasa (pronounced Wa-chee-ra-ya-na-wa-ro-rot), King Mongkut's son, born in 1860 A.D. He was a brilliant scholar and continued the work

of reform and religious teaching begun by his father. In 1910 A.D. he was appointed Sangharaja and he died in 1921 A.D.

The walls and pillars of the Bot are covered with paintings. Going from the door towards the image there are five pillars on either side, similarly decorated. The first pair are in sombre colours on a black ground and show a small picture of people hunting and fishing, killing and, therefore according to Buddhist precepts, sinning. The next two are in lighter colours with blue predominating to show some progress in the matter of enlightenment. The accused is being defended by a lawyer before a judge, indicating impartiality. The third pillars are of a reddish colour which is even better than blue and the pictures show people going to the temple to listen to a sermon. The fourth pillars are pink and the figures dressed in white to show that they are pure and getting close to the Dharma. The last pair are painted in white and red and the figures on the painting have donned the yellow robe.

The mural paintings are also interesting. They were done at the time when King Mongkut was establishing friendly relations with the western countries. The story seems to start above the west windows with a rather gloomy representation of Thailand before western contact. The other pictures are all in brighter colours and show the contributions of various western countries. England is represented by horse racing and the bhikkhu who explained the pictures to me was kind enough to

say that the forward movement of the horse was a symbol of progress. France is more elegantly represented with modern buildings. The Netherland's contribution is in the form of agriculture and canal drainage. America follows with ships bringing missionaries and a long line of people in western dress going to church. This was apparently intended to prophesy that, when Christianity gained some influence in Thailand, the people would give up their own costume in favour of western clothes. The next picture shows people in search of mineral deposits and is thought to be Germany's contribution. The last painting is the Buddhist year 2,500 (1957 A.D.) with Buddhism known all over the world. This is depicted by a lotus flower rising above water and people all around, the water being the religion and the lotus the Lord Buddha. Between the windows are paintings showing ordination of bhikkhu and pilgrimage.

Over the Phra Jinasiha there is an umbrella which at first had five tiers. When Prince Mongkut became king, four more tiers were added and the king also had the image gilded.

Outside behind the Bot a terraced platform was built for the cremation of the Wangna Prince's wife. Behind that again Prince Mongkut built a huge cetiya in the round style which he favoured. (The only cetiya which he ever built in the polygonal style is the blue one which he had built for himself at Wat Po.) This cetiya was finished after Prince Mongkut became king when a bronze elephant, lion, horse and eagle were

added to the pediments to mark the four cardinal points. The cetiya is on a raised platform with ornamental Chinese-style pavilions at the corners.

Set in a niche facing the cetiya between the elephant and the eagle there is a very important Buddha image. It is Srivijaya period and its name is Phra Buddha Pairi Pinat which means Destroyer of Enemies. It belonged to King Mongkut.

There are two Vihara behind the Bot but they are opened only on special occasions such as a Royal visit to the wat. The one immediately behind the cetiya is a beautiful little chapel with its walls depicting the Chinese History of the Three Kingdoms, a story much loved by the Thai people. In front of the door King Mongkut is represented by a standing Buddha in royal vestments presented by King Chulalongkorn to the wat. On the right is a standing Buddha wearing the robe of a bhikkhu over both shoulders. It was put there by King Chulalongkorn for Prince Pavaret, the second abbot, and is placed over his ashes. In 1930 A.D. King Rama VII placed a statue on the left of the door for Prince Vajirayana, the third abbot. It is a standing image in brass in the attitude of subduing the ocean.

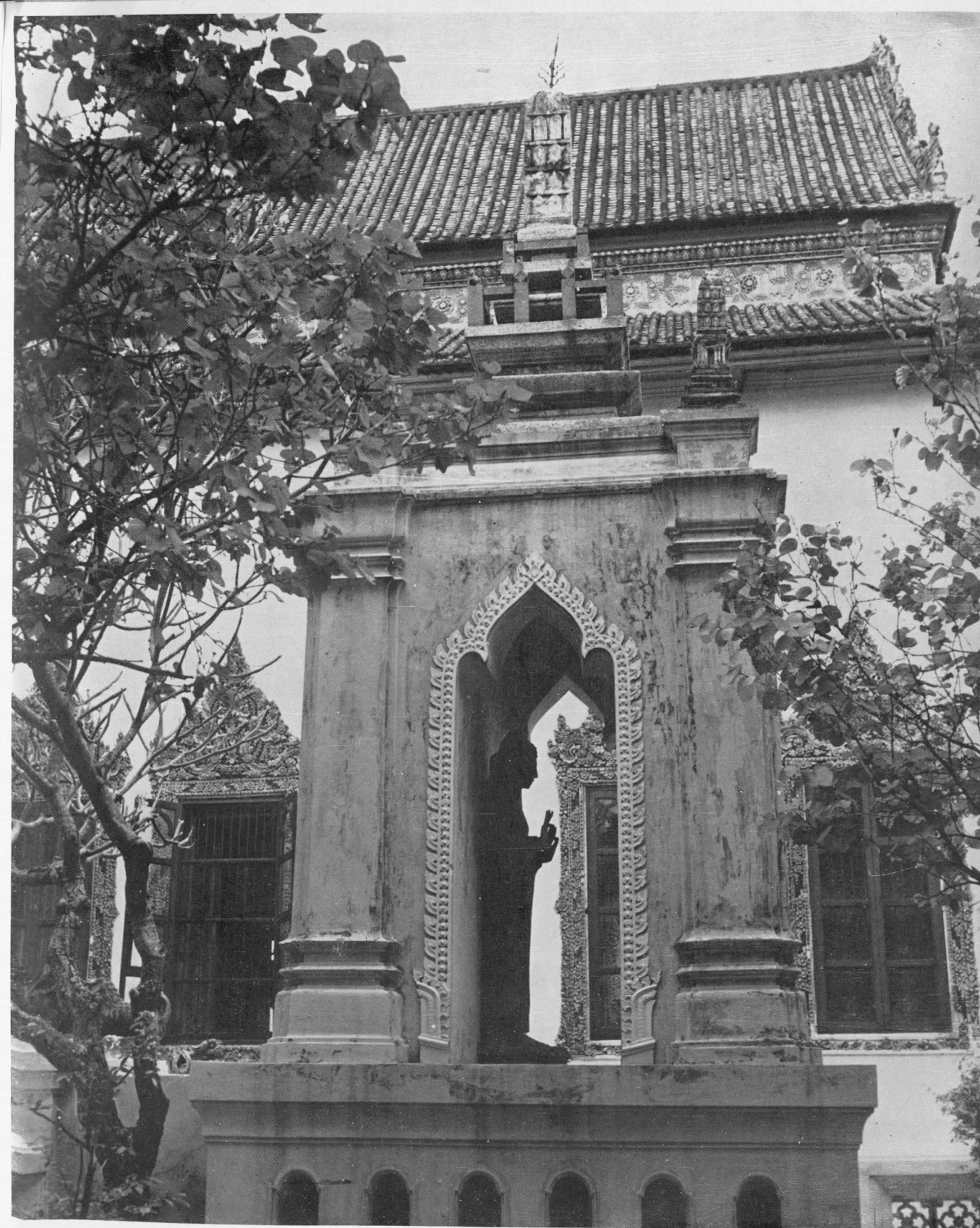
The other Vihara is divided into two chambers. The eastern one contains a sitting image known as Phra Sasda. It is made of bronze and came originally from Pitsanuloke. It was in Thonburi before being brought to Bangkok. The walls



of this room were painted by order of King Chulalongkorn and depict the lives of bhikkhu, how they eat how they live, some in the country, some in the town and some in the forest. There is a reclining Buddha of the Sukhodaya period which is considered the most beautiful reclining Buddha in Thailand. It is made of bronze and is known as Phra Sriya. It is the Buddha dying. Little angels float down from the walls to witness his passing. Bhikkhu pray behind him. Indian figures watch from the lower walls the sublime moment.

To the west of this Vihara at the end of King Mongkut's reign a cutting from the Bodhi tree at Buddhagaya was planted. It is now a large tree surrounded by a gallery which at present is most unfortunately in a state of disrepair. Another tree grown from a similar shoot can be seen in the adjoining courtyard east of the Bot. It grows beside the pavilion which was Prince Pavaret's personal residence, a room rather quaintly decorated with Chinese plates plastered into the walls.

Across the road opposite the main entrance the Mahamakuta University was founded by the third abbot in 1892 A.D. New premises have been built within the walls of the wat and the University has been transferred to them. It is, of course, a centre of instruction for bhikkhu. There is also a lay secondary school within the grounds, built in Gothic style.



*A standing Dvaravati image*



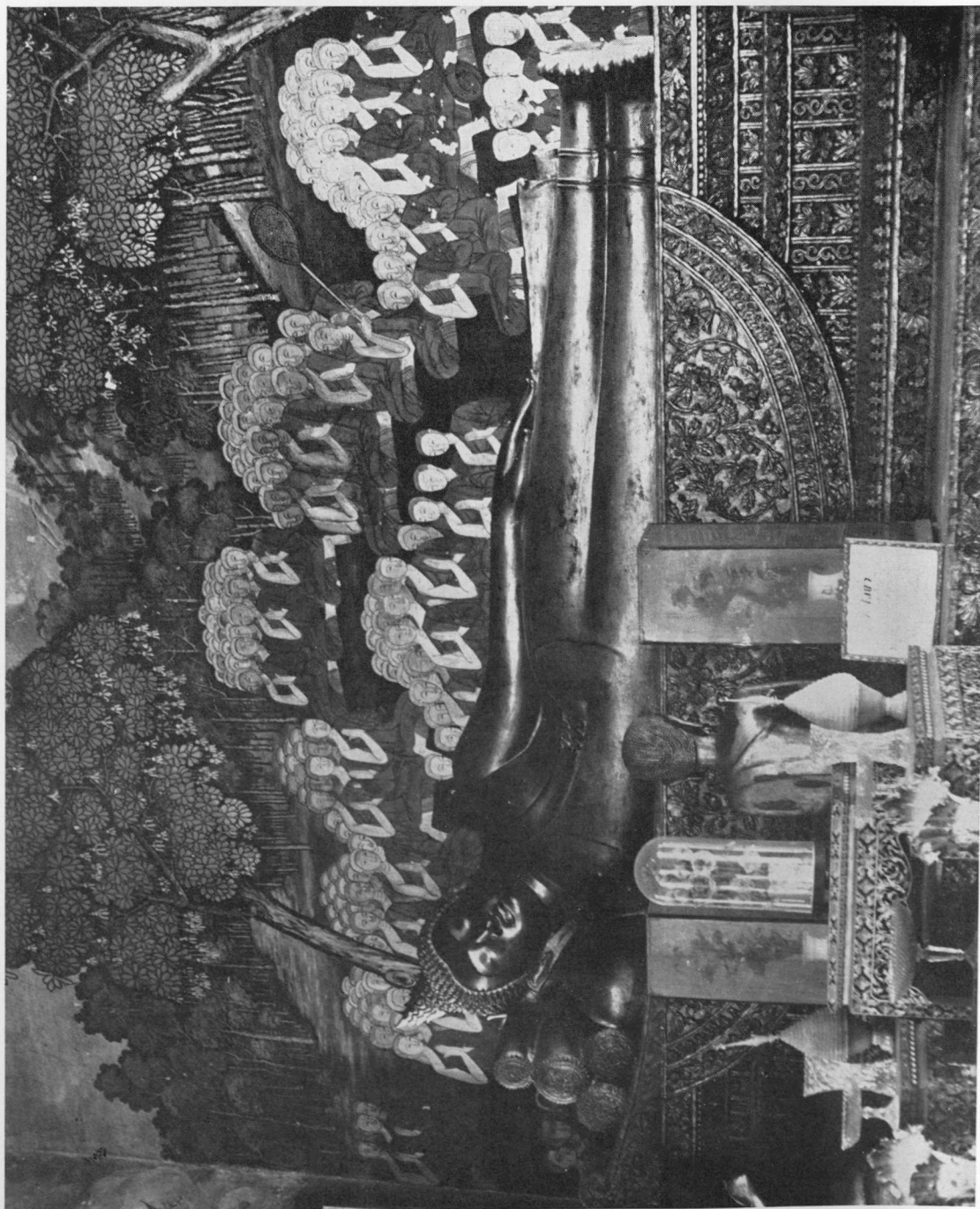


*A sitting Buddha from Lopburi*



*A near view of the Lopburi image*





*Phra Saiya*

## *WAT BENCHAMABOPIT*

*or*

### *The Marble Temple*

**W**AT BENCHAMABOPIT, OR THE MARBLE Temple as western people often call it, is most satisfactory architecturally with its symmetry and lovely proportions. I see no reason why its rich ornamentation should displease western taste, as it has been known to do. It is an eastern temple found in the abundance of a tropical land. The richness of its brown, red and gold imposed on the blue Bangkok sky, itself perhaps enhanced by clouds, is something one cannot easily forget. Pigeons fly overhead, lighting on the ornamental roofs and on the reflecting polished stone of the courtyard. Trees enhance the grounds, and the whole is wrapped in contemplative quiet.

Here there are no cetiya to distract the eye; only a satisfying unity, the conception of one man. The wide-fronted white marble Bot faces east, and behind it the marble courtyard is enclosed by a cloister. Other buildings, including the cells of the bhikkhu and a secondary school, lie to the south on the other side of a small canal, in no way disturbing the sense of unity.

The first time I visited this wat was on an early evening when the sun was already coloured for setting, the door of the Bot facing the main gate was open, inside on the floor were

the yellow-robed bhikkhu at their evening prayers, and over them the golden gleam of a large and most revered image. I went through the gate and stopped, quite unprepared for the scene before me. During my frequent visits to Wat Benchamabopit I have seen many people arrested in exactly the same way.

This wat is built on the site of an old wat which was at different times called Wat Sai Thong and Wat Lem, a little country wat standing on open ground. It was first given some importance when it was restored in 1827 A.D. by the sons of King Rama II. Five cetiya were erected for him and his four brothers and the king was pleased to rename the wat Benchabopit, meaning the Wat of the Five Princes. We hear no more of it until 1899 A.D. when King Chulalongkorn decided to restore it completely in order to compensate for the destruction of two old wats during the making of the nearby Dusit Palace. The name was then changed to Benchamabopit, the Wat of the Fifth King.

The work was put in the care of Somdej Chaofa Krom Praya Narissaranuwattiwongs, a member of the Royal family, and King Chulalongkorn gave his personal attention to the details, exchanging correspondence with the architect on the matter.

The heir to the throne died in 1894 A.D. and the king decided to use money from his estate to build a school within the grounds of the wat. Four designs were submitted for his

choice. The railings which surround the grounds of the wat were designed by the architect and approved by the king. They were cast in the Marine Workshops.

On entering the east gate of the wat, two small pavilions can be seen to right and left. At one time the northern one contained a Burmese image of the Buddha in white alabaster and the southern one a bronze image of the Buddha sitting on the naga. The latter was originally in Chaiya in the south of Thailand and bears a twelfth century inscription in Cambodian script. Now the two pavilions are empty. The alabaster image is in the museum of the wat and the other is in the Bronze Room of the National Museum.

There are one or two interesting buildings on the south side of the small canal which runs through the grounds of the wat. Proceeding from east to west, there are two buildings which were originally in the Grand Palace and formed the pavilion in which King Chulalongkorn lived during his priesthood. On special occasions the abbot of the wat lives there, but his usual residence is a more modern building in the grounds behind the Bot. The third building is the museum of the wat, known as Vihara Somdej. It was built as the library and has beautiful windows lacquered in black and gold. On the north side of the canal behind the cloister there is a lovely Bodhi tree, an offshoot of the original tree under which the Lord Buddha sat at Buddhagaya in India.



The large image inside the Bot is a copy of the Phra Buddha Jinaraja of Pitsunuloke, one of the most revered images in the country. King Chulalongkorn had this copy cast in 1901 A.D., and it contains part of his ashes, placed there at his own request by his son.

The interior walls of the Bot contain niches, each of which has a painting of a famous cetiya or prang. As one faces the big image, on the right is a painting of a cetiya at Swankalok and on the left one at Ayudhya. In the transept on the right is Nakorn Pathom and opposite it Nakorn Srithammara; on the left is Lampun with Nakorn Panom opposite. In the nave on the right is again Swankalok and on the left Lopburi. The ceiling of the Bot is red with richly gilded ornamentation.

The images are the most interesting part of this wat. The cloister enclosing the courtyard behind the Bot contains fifty-three images of the Buddha, representing original images brought from different parts of Thailand or from abroad or copies of such images. The collection was made for King Chulalongkorn by Prince Damrong Rajanubhab. The images were required to be made of bronze and of a more or less equal size. This explains why an image had to be copied in certain instances as the original was either too large or too small to match the others in the gallery. There are many fine images here representing the Buddha in different attitudes, but the finest of them all is the walking Buddha in Sukhodaya style, probably

one of the most beautiful Buddha images ever cast. When an image had to be copied someone would usually present the copy to the king for the wat as this is a recognised form of making merit.

Behind the Bot is a shrine containing a large standing Buddha in the Lopburi style. Passing through the west door of the gallery opposite this image, other stone images can be found set in niches against the outer walls of the gallery. Turning left to the south wall of the gallery is an image from the Dvaravati period and another from the same period on the west wall, both found at Lopburi. On the right of the west door on the north wall is an image of the Ayudhya period found at Lopburi, and on the west wall one which was given to King Chulalongkorn when he passed through Ceylon on his first visit to Europe. It is the best specimen of an image of the Amaravati period and was presented to the wat by King Chulalongkorn.



*Wat Benchamabopit*



*Gates and railings*





*Vihara Somdej*

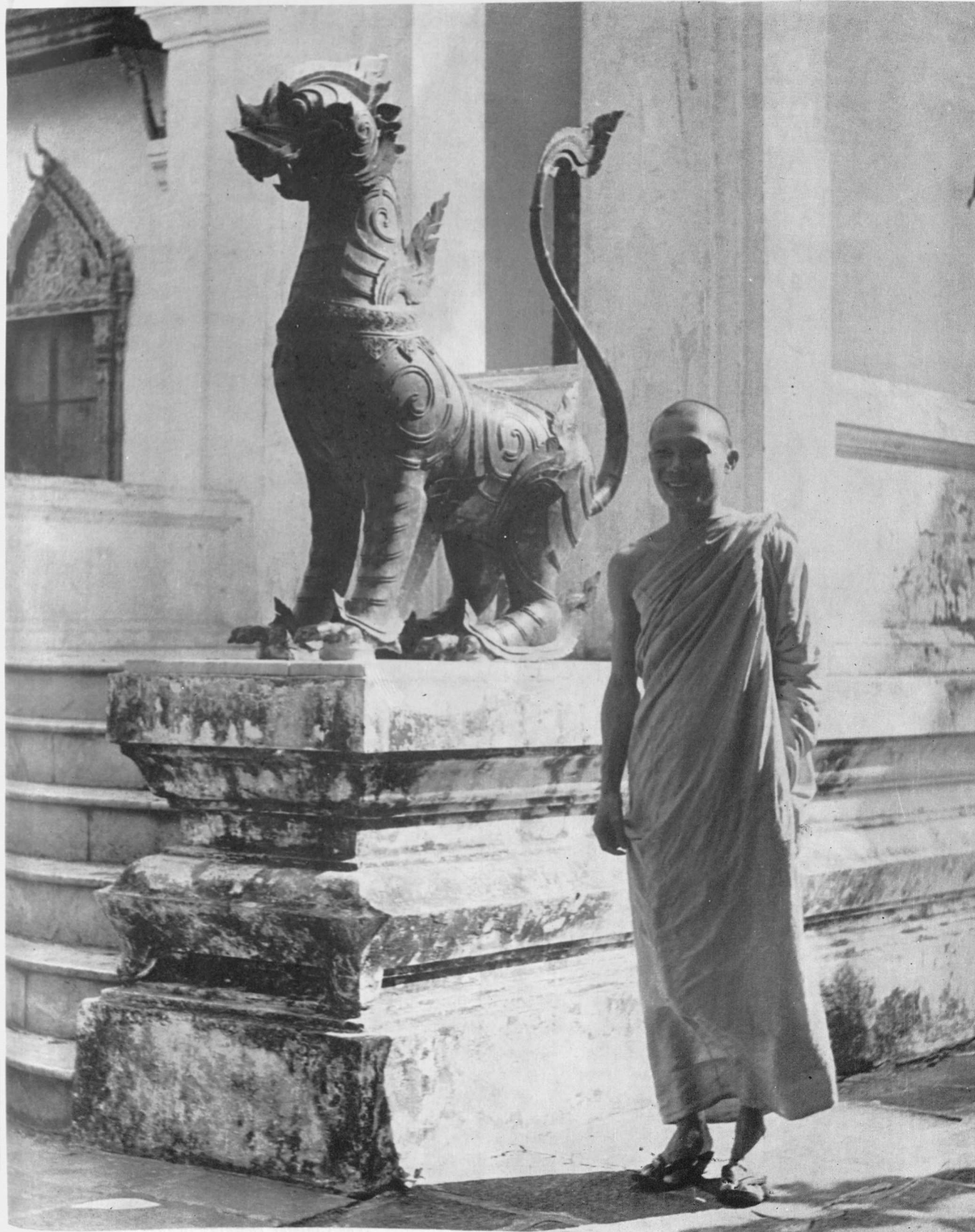


*A standing Buddha in the Lopburi Style*





ing Buddha in the Sukhodaya Style



Bhikkhu and Thai lion





*The Cloister contains images*

## *WAT RAJABOPIT*

**F**LOWERING TREES, A ROYAL MEMORIAL garden and a round cloister with a golden cetiya rising from its centre distinguish Wat Rajabopit, the Temple of the King. It was built by command of King Chulalongkorn in 1870 A.D. It occupies quite a small area of land and is architecturally unique for no other wat in Thailand is built in the same style.

The tall, gilded cetiya which forms the centre of the wat is built over a vaulted room containing a large stone image of the Buddha sitting on the naga. It came from Lopburi.

Around the outside of the cetiya there are niches containing images taken from various wats, one of them in Royal vestments. In the niche which faces west there is a shrine to the second abbot of the wat, who became Sangharaja in 1922 A.D. He was Mom Chao Pu Chong.

A courtyard encircles the cetiya, and the whole is enclosed a circular gallery interrupted by the Bot and three Vihara. Access to the courtyard is by the Bot or the western Vihara.

The circular cloister, the exterior walls of the Bot and the lower part of the cetiya are all covered with glazed tiles brought from China. There is a subtle blending of blue, yellow, red and green, the whole combining to give a mellow and mature effect.

The doors and windows of the Bot are inlaid with mother of pearl, the motif depicting the insignia of honours bestowed by the King. The doors are inset in the walls and on the side walls of this little recess there is a bas-relief of a demi-god with a dog at his feet. He is guarding the Bot and his name is Khio Kang which means "The One With Long Teeth."

The interior of the Bot, with its vaulted roof, conveys in miniature the atmosphere of a cathedral and, at the same time, with its pale blue and gilt, suggests a rather ornate period drawing-room. King Chulalongkorn admired western art, but this wat was built before he visited Europe. The doors are lacquered in the traditional Thai black and gold.

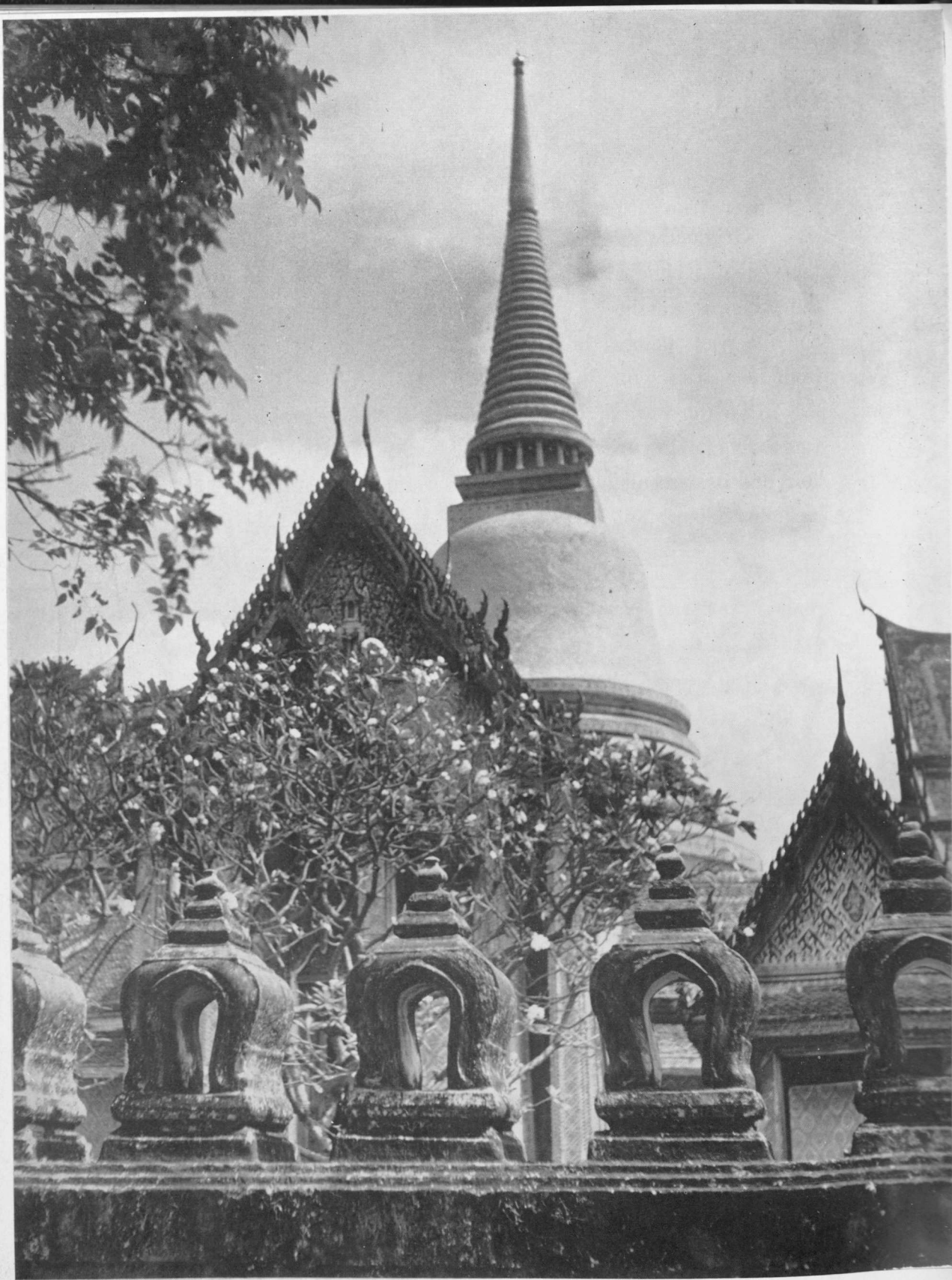
Above the centre door facing the image is a royal crest for King Chulalongkorn. It consists of a three-headed elephant flanked by a nine-tiered umbrella with a lion under the right-hand one and an elephant under the other. The Thai motto inscribed on the crest might be freely translated as "Unity brings progress."

The Buddha image in the Bot was cast by order of King Chulalongkorn after the style of King Rama IV's reign by Phra Ong Chao Praditworakan. It was placed in the Bot at Wat Rajabopit in 1872 A.D. and later an altar containing a certain percentage of gold was made for it.

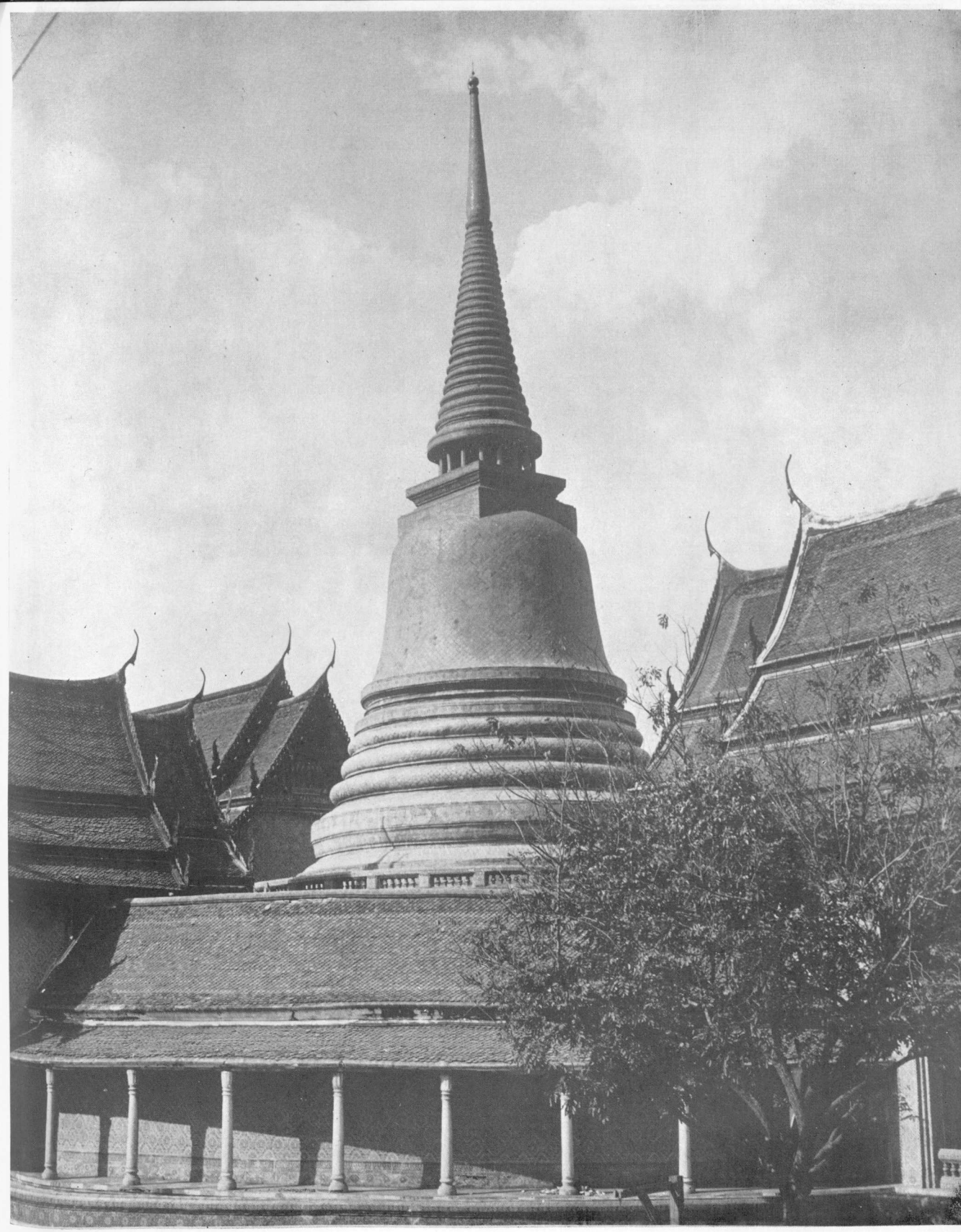
Originally the life story of the Buddha was painted on the walls. King Rama VII (1925-1935 A.D.) regarded this as the principal wat in Bangkok. He had the paintings removed and the walls painted blue with gilded celestial flowers, come from heaven to worship there.

To the west of the main group of buildings there is a garden containing memorials to the family of King Chulalongkorn and its descendants. There are several styles of architecture, including Gothic and Khmer.





*Flowering trees*

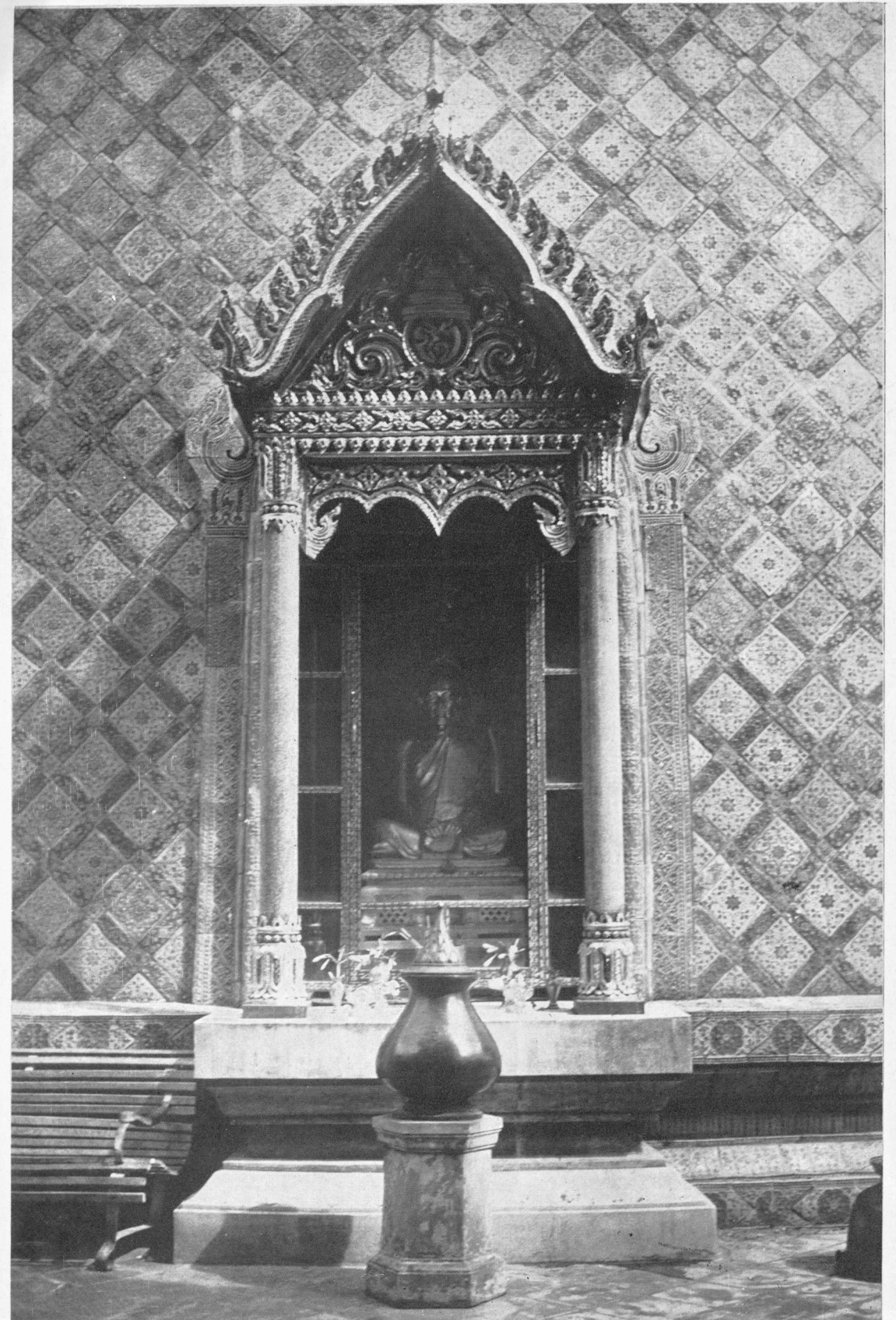


*The gilded Cetiya forms the centre of the Wat*





*The motif of doors and windows*



*Shrine to a Sangharaja*





*The interior of the Bot*

## GLOSSARY

Arunrajawararam

Four Pali words 'aruna' (dawn) 'rāja' (royal) 'vara' (choice, excellent) 'ārāma' (originally a park, now a temple).

Bhikkhu

Literally 'a beggar or 'one who lives by begging'.

Bot

From 'uposatha' the sacred day, being the 1st, 8th, 15th and 23rd nights of the lunar month. 'Uposatha kamma' is the service on such days. 'Uposathāgāra' is the house for 'Uposatha' and hence the Bot or temple.

Chakri

From 'chakri' having 'cakra' or the wheel of power.

Daja Disorn

'Teja-atissara' the supreme lord of power.

Dhammayuttika

Joined or yoked according to the law or set up strictly in accordance with the Buddha's prescription without any interruption in the line of ordination since his time.

Jinaraja (Phra Buddha)	From Pali 'Jina-rāja' the King of Conquerors.
Keoh	A Thai word meaning glass or crystal.
Luang (Cetiya)	A Thai word meaning great or royal.
Muccalinda tree	Barringtonia Racimosa.
Nera	From 'sāmaṇera' the offspring of a 'samaṇa' or monk. Abbreviated to 'nera' which is pronounced 'nain' to rhyme with 'rain.'
Nok	A Thai word meaning bird.
Phra	From Sanskrit 'vara' meaning the best, choice or a suitor.
Phu Chong	From Pali 'Bhujāṅga' meaning a snake.
Phu Khao Thong	Three Thai words. 'Phu' and 'khao' both mean a mountain or a hill. 'Thong' means gold.
Ramayana	From Sanskrit 'rāmāyaṇa', an epic the Thai version of which is called Rama-kian from 'rāma-kirti.'

Ruang	A Thai word meaning shining or glowing.
Sasda	From Sanskrit 'śaṣṭa' meaning the teacher.
Srisanphejna	This means holy and omniscient and is derived from three Sanskrit words 'śrī' good, 'sarva' all and 'jñā' knowing.
Tak Sin	King Tak Sin was at one time governor of the town of Tak and Sin was his own name.
Vidyalyaya	From 'vidyālaya' the seat of knowledge.